DUCKMAN & the CROW

#142

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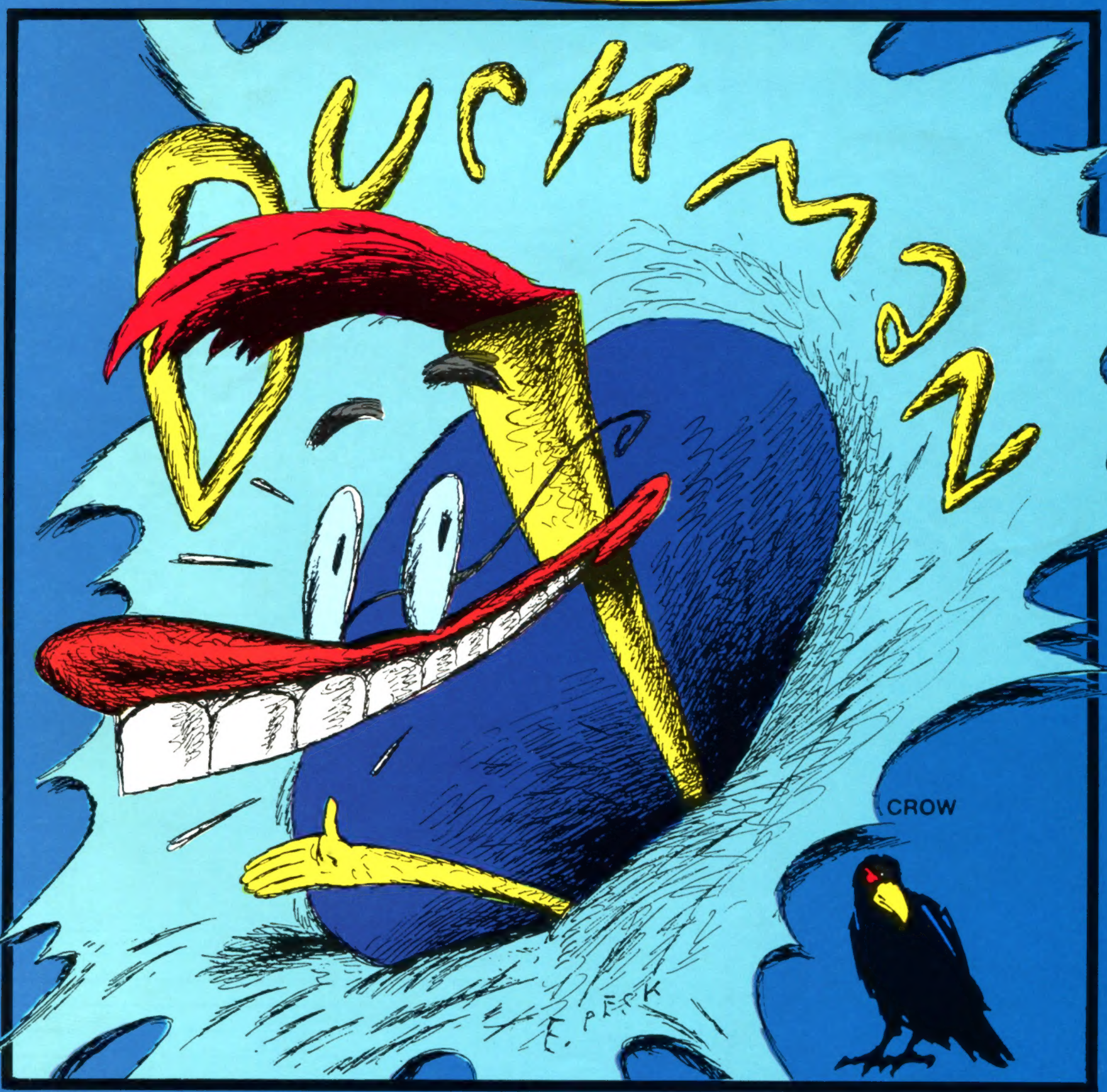

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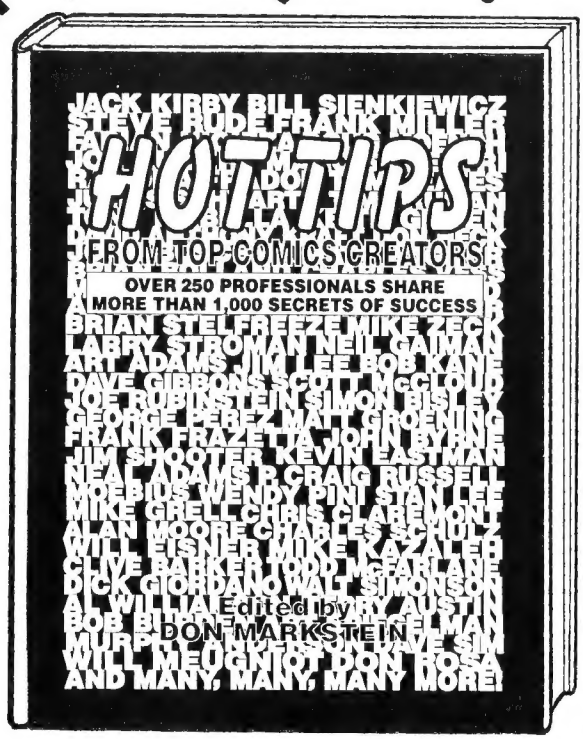
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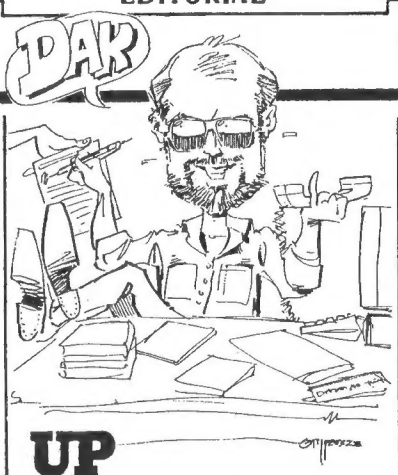

UP FRONT

This issue marks another first for COMICS INTERVIEW — our induction into the so-called Information Superhighway, specifically for the purpose of speeding.

Owing to an aggravating series of acts beyond our ability to control, this issue was in dire danger of missing a fatal deadline. The problem was — how to conduct, tape, transcribe and, yes, typeset the lead interviews . . . all in less than *two days!*

The solution?

Have the interviews conducted entirely on CompuServe, e-mailed to the typesetter who could download the ASCII files to computer, code for typesetting, and run it out. It's actually kind of mind-boggling, living in this world of the future that was only so much science fiction just a few short years ago.

After all, not much more than a hundred years ago, to get the written word cross country, someone had to ride hell-for-leather on horseback — typewriters were new technology at the time. And here we were, "surfing the internet," the lead interview being conducted by someone in California with someone in New York, then downloaded into computer for typesetting in Arizona, finally emerging from Cyberspace for the very first time, only a couple of hours later, out of a fax machine in Georgia, for proofing.

Meanwhile, the layouts would be done — ready to "drop in" the final type when it arrived via Next Day air delivery — in time to turn the issue around and ship it to our printer the very same day, again via Next Day Air.

Of course, it's not the technology that actually accomplished the impossible. It's the actions of all the individuals who took responsibility for making the whole thing work in record time — from interviewers through typesetter and printers.

Did it work?

If you're reading this editorial, holding issue #142 in hand, then the answer is — yes.

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"James O'Barr is working on his second

the CROW

The Crow © and ™ James O'Barr. Artwork © 1991 James O'Barr.

graphic album, GOTHIK, from Dark Horse."

Bess Cutler Gallery is a contemporary art gallery in SoHo, New York, which focuses on pop artists, most recently influential comics artists. In May 1994, they opened a show on the same day as THE CROW (the movie) opened, focusing on James O'Barr's original drawings for his comics series. Now, with rumors of a movie sequel in the making, and a CROW/FAUST comics crossover, and an avid international interest in all matters CROW-related, we had an opportunity to chat with the owner/operator, Bess Cutler, about her unique gallery and about THE CROW . . .

MARK LUCAS: *What is Bess Cutler Gallery?*

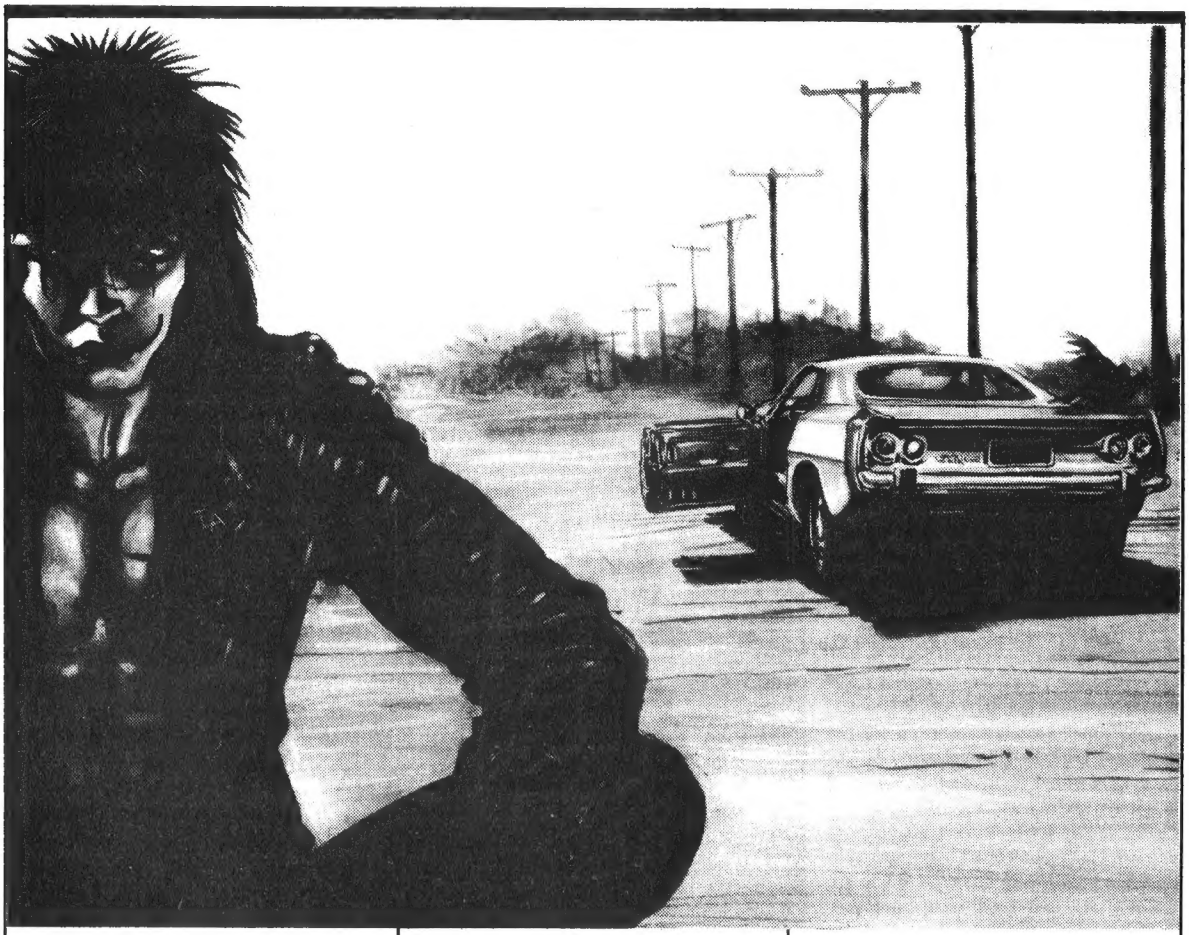
BESS CUTLER: I started the gallery in Boston in the late 1970s and moved it to SoHo in 1983, where it's been ever since. The gallery had been an emerging contemporary artists' gallery from 1983-1992 when "along came **Robert Williams.**"

The turning point for the gallery, the whole point of our new catalogue and working with **James O'Barr** is that, in the fall of 1992, Bess was the first gallery to give **Robert Williams** a show of originals paintings and drawings in SoHo. It had taken Robert 30 years to crack SoHo. From Robert, it became very apparent to switch to this type of pop art, cartoon art, comics art, what have you. Indeed, it was a part of the fine art milieu.

In retrospect, it was interesting. **Robert Williams'** show should have taken place right after **Lichtenstein** and **Warhol.** Why the 30-year hiatus? I'll never know. It shouldn't have happened, but it happened. **Robert Williams** is the next step after **Warhol** and **Lichtenstein.** After Robert, the gallery had two individual shows of **Clive Barker.** Two individual shows of **James O'Barr. Bill Ward's** first and only show (who pre-dated PENTHOUSE and PLAYBOY). So, we switched to this.

The catalogue we currently have is recognition of all this. When we had the **Robert Williams** show, you never saw such a crowd in your life. This is the depths of the recession, the depths of the doldrums in SoHo. All of the pieces sold before the show ever opened. The line was literally around the block. You realize that there's this huge audience of young people to come to art galleries who can't afford the paintings but who want to come and see what's in a SoHo gallery. These artists, of course, come with their own built-in followings — **Clive Barker** with his movies and books, **James O'Barr** with THE CROW.

"The producers who did THE CROW had the



MARK: *Let's go back a bit. How did you hook up with James O'Barr?*
BESS: A friend of mine who is at Miramax in New York (the movie distributor) actually introduced the gallery to **Clive Barker,** because it was Miramax who distributed one of the HELLRAISER pictures. She knew Clive was an artist but had never been in a gallery, so she introduced Clive to us. We went from there.

A similar thing happened when THE CROW was coming. Miramax was distributing THE CROW. Several months before THE CROW was released, we were introduced to **James O'Barr.**

MARK: *When did you start showing James O'Barr's work?*
BESS: The first show opened the same day the movie opened, which I believe was Friday, May 13, 1994.

MARK: *And, how was that received by the public?*
BESS: Fantastic. The show was in three parts. It opened on May 13th. Part Two of the exhibition opened at the gallery in mid-July. Part Two had actually opened before. Before we met James, the exhibition had already opened at Words & Pictures Museum in Northampton, MA. The work that was shown there was brought down and shown in New York, which became Part Two.

In addition, we probably did 12-15 conventions between June and December, in which James would sign the books and all. Among the venues: Dallas, Houston, Chicago, Tulsa, Atlanta, New Orleans, Los Angeles, Baltimore, etc.

That all culminated for James in December, because the publishers of THE CROW had begun licensing the rights for foreign language. In Italy, the Italian publisher brought the book out in November. The book was phenomenal. It outsold SPAWN three to one. The publisher was so excited that he asked James to come over to put on an exhibition in a museum in Rome, Palazzo delle Espozioni. That ran from mid-December through January. This was a major museum.

You have to understand that they call this the "new museum" in Rome. When they say "new museum," it was built in 1900. It's not Los Angeles. It looked like the Parthenon. He was only the second American ever so honored at this museum (the first was **Art Spiegelman**).

It was a tremendous feather in his cap. Clive will actually be honored there in June. Along the way, I was voted one of the 100 Cutting Edge People in New York, as it represented a major breakthrough for a SoHo art gallery to commit to these

option to produce the movie of GOTHIK."

artists.

It was also a culmination for **Robert Williams;** a year after the show, ART FORUM, the most prestigious art magazine in the United States if not the world, ran a feature article on him.

MARK: *What are you offering now in terms of O'Barr works?*

BESS: We just have so much material that we offer a separate catalogue for his art.

Let me give you a little background on James. James comes from the greater Detroit area, where he still lives. He's 34 years old. He had never really sold his work before. He worked on THE CROW for over ten years. It is based on a somewhat true event in his life.

Since he had been working for 15 years, he had a tremendous volume of work, maybe 400 pieces (probably half of which have now been sold). There's still a good backlog.

James is now working on his second graphic novel, GOTHIK, to be published by Dark Horse, to be out in late '95 or early '96 and serialized in 8-10 parts. That will be another 400 works. Slowly and steadily that work will also be filtered through the gallery.

When an artist works through a gallery, it's not a one-night stand; it's a longtime

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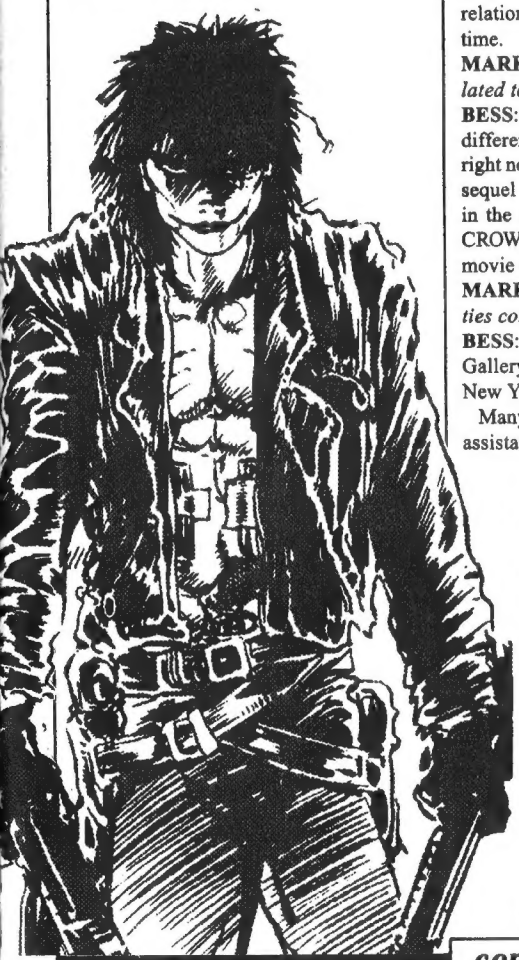
"In Italy, THE CROW outsold SPAWN."



relationship. The work is available all the time.

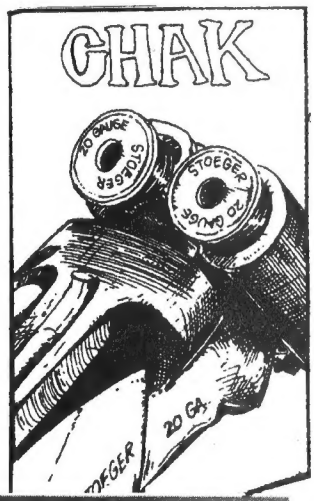
MARK: *And this GOTHIK, is that related to THE CROW?*

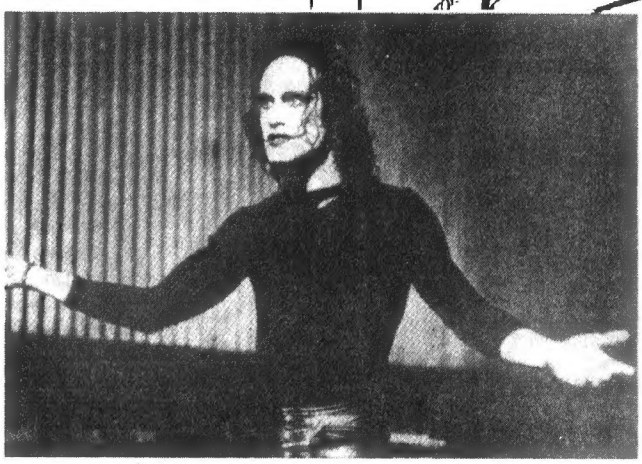
BESS: It's an entirely new story with a different character entirely. The question right now is whether they're going to do a sequel or not to THE CROW. It's still up in the air. The producers who did THE CROW have the option to produce the movie of GOTHIK.

MARK: *Lastly, how can interested parties contact you for your catalogue?*

BESS: They can write to Bess Cutler Gallery, 379 West Broadway, SoHo, New York, 10012 or call (212) 219-1577.

Many thanks to **Herb Schwartz** for his assistance.





"At those moments when the frustrations match or

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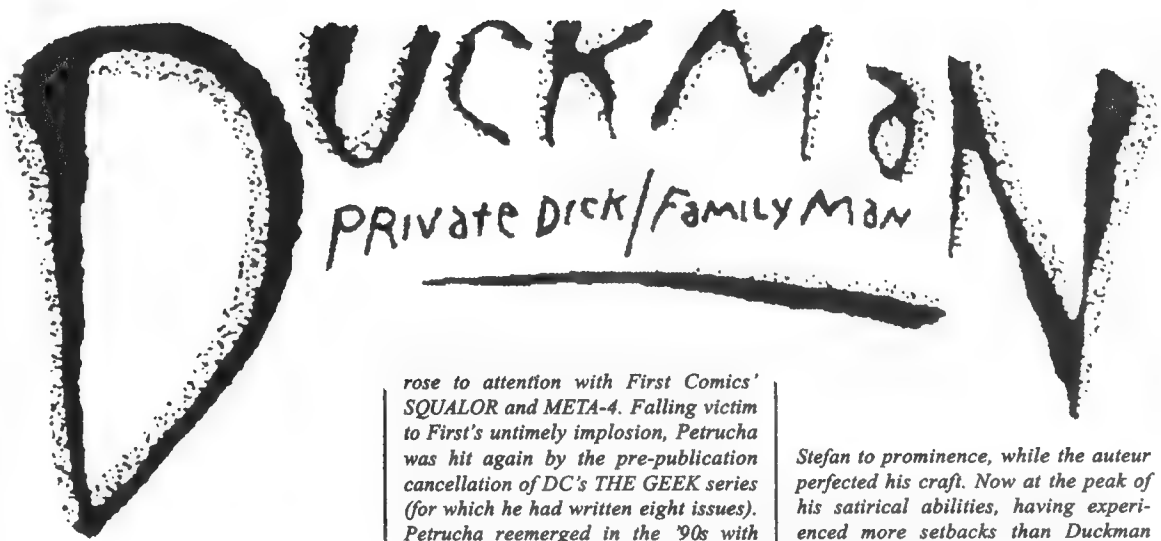
surmount our will to continue — we are all Duckman."



A longtime comics journeyman, Stefan Petrucha has taken the far road to success. Hitting the ground running in the mid-'80s, Stefan rose to attention with First Comics' SQUALOR and META-4. Falling victim to First's untimely implosion, Petrucha was hit again by the pre-publication cancellation of DC's THE GEEK series (for which he had written eight issues). Petrucha reemerged in the '90s with NEXUS THE LIBERATOR and Topps' unpublished THE LAST ACTION HERO adaptation, which led to his work on Topps' THE X-FILES and DUCKMAN. A long and tumultuous route has taken Stefan to prominence, while the auteur perfected his craft. Now at the peak of his satirical abilities, having experienced more setbacks than Duckman himself, Stefan is trim and tan and ready to offer some of the best that comics has to offer. In a first for COMICS INTERVIEW, we conducted this discussion online . . .

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Stefan Petrucha
Age: 36
Place of Birth: The Bronx
Place of Residence: Westchester County
Education: Bronx HS of Science BA in Literature from SUNY; Purchase Certificate in Video Production from the Center for Media Arts
Occupation: Writer
Hobbies: Forteana, Computer Games
Books Read Recently: THE MYTH OF REPRESSED MEMORY, HOW TO DIGITIZE VIDEO, TINKER AT PILGRIM'S CREEK by **Annie Dillard,** THE NIGHT STALKER by **Jeff Rice**
Other: Did I mention that I was **Joseph L. Mankiewicz'** personal assistant?

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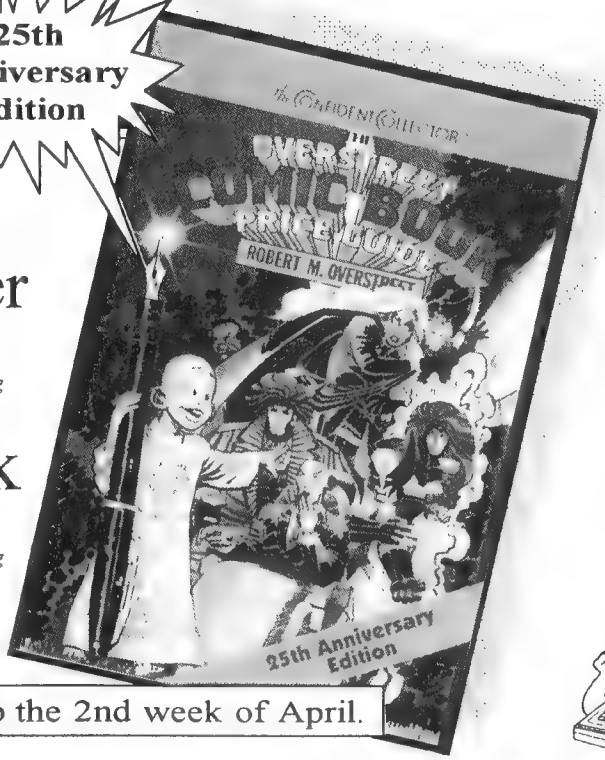

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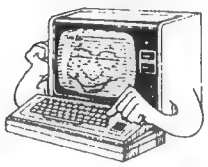

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"I felt like Charlie Brown, with the entire industry playing Lucy, ready to yank away the football at the last minute."

MARK LUCAS: *How did you receive the esteemed honor of scripting duties on DUCKMAN?*

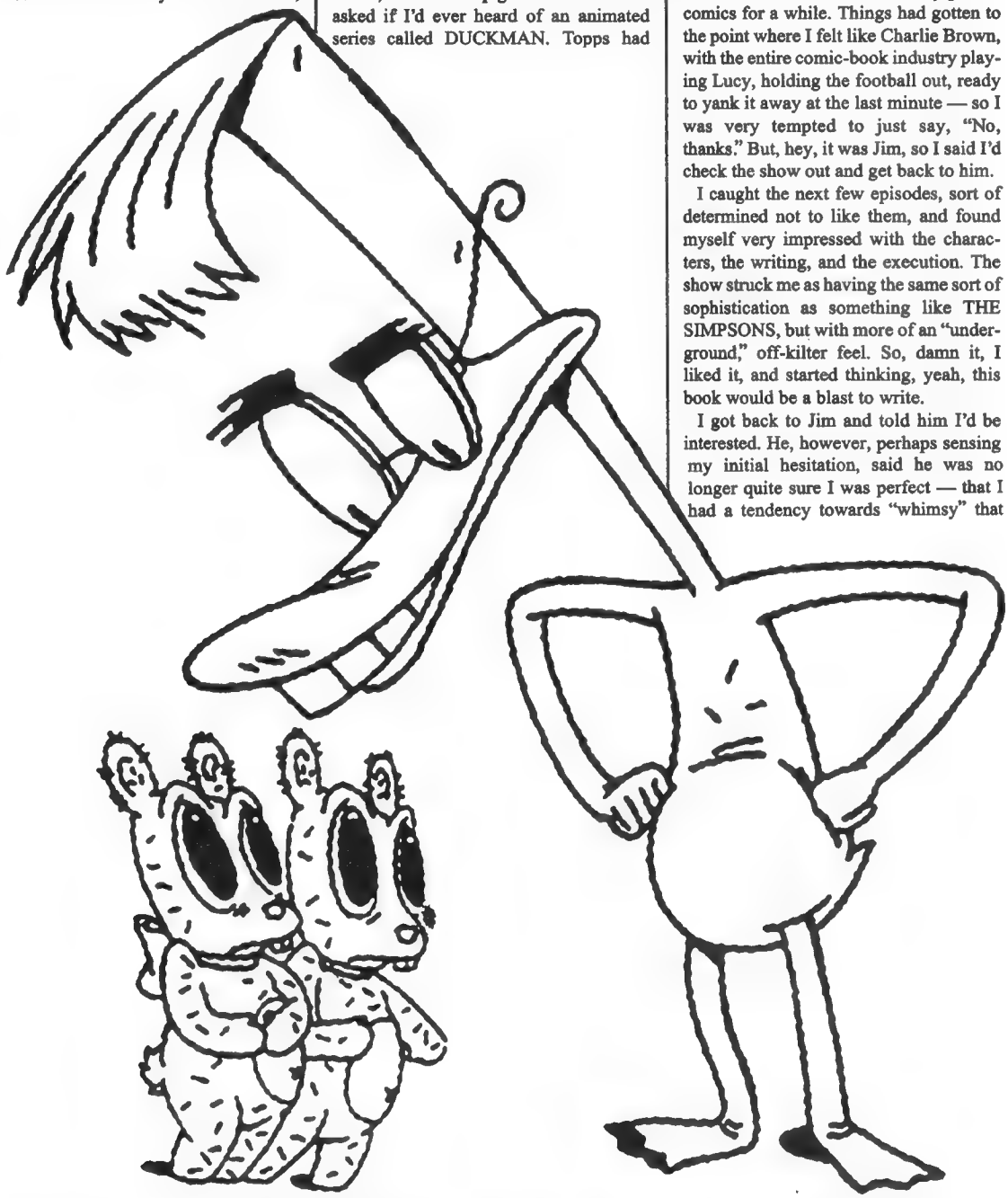
STEFAN PETRUCHA: First off, I want to know how you knew I was "trim and tan" — a situation I haven't been in for years. But, it so happens, I've recently dropped about 25 pounds and have returned from a week stay in the Bahamas, our first vacation since our honeymoon. As we were leaving, a 10-foot shark entered the swimmer's area of the beach — causing quite a panic. Best vacation I've ever been on.

Anyway, to answer your question, some time ago, just as I'd resolved to give up on this comic-book writing thing once and for all, **Jim Salicrup** gave me a buzz and asked if I'd ever heard of an animated series called DUCKMAN. Topps had acquired the rights, and given my satirical work on LANCE BARNES and COUNTERPARTS, Jim thought I'd be the man for the job.

Normally, this is the sort of phone call any freelancer waits and prays for. I, however, had just gone through this wrenching soul-searching period during which I'd decided *not* to actively pursue comics for a while. Things had gotten to the point where I felt like Charlie Brown, with the entire comic-book industry playing Lucy, holding the football out, ready to yank it away at the last minute — so I was very tempted to just say, "No, thanks." But, hey, it was Jim, so I said I'd check the show out and get back to him.

I caught the next few episodes, sort of determined not to like them, and found myself very impressed with the characters, the writing, and the execution. The show struck me as having the same sort of sophistication as something like THE SIMPSONS, but with more of an "underground," off-kilter feel. So, damn it, I liked it, and started thinking, yeah, this book would be a blast to write.

I got back to Jim and told him I'd be interested. He, however, perhaps sensing my initial hesitation, said he was no longer quite sure I was perfect — that I had a tendency towards "whimsy" that



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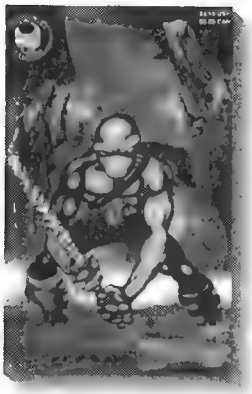

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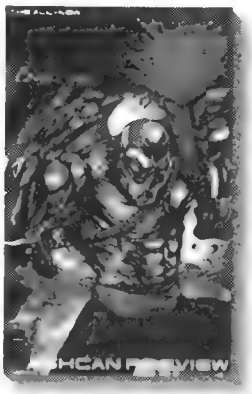

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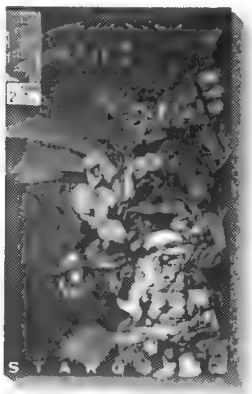

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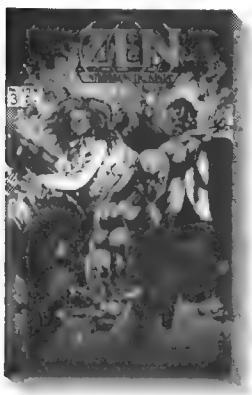

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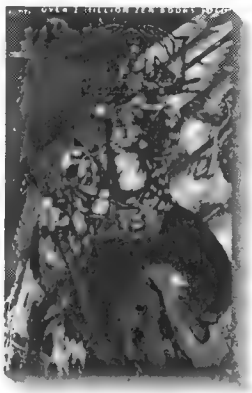

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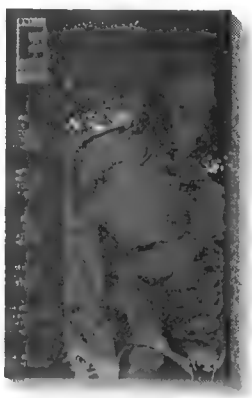

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"Some of my relationships with women during my college days hold up as my funniest work."

might not suit the gritty DUCKMAN mileu. That was all I needed to hear — a challenge. So I knocked off about 15 or so springboards that captured, as best as I could, the feel of the show. From what I've heard, the proposal not only went over well at Topps, but creator **Everett Peck** and the folks from Klasky and Csupo absolutely loved it. And we were off — and here we are.

MARK: *The first issue of the Topps comic was . . . surreal.*

STEFAN: Thanks — that was the general idea. I don't know if hitting **William Burroughs** first off was neccesarily the sanest way to start the series, but I really liked the film NAKED LUNCH and hey, what's sane got to do with DUCKMAN?

A lot of wonderful coincidences went into making that issue work. The whole 3D Image cover blends really well with the story plot. I mean, you know, the story's about Duckman being unable to remember a NAKED DUCK and there's one right on a cover which 50% of the population probably can't see. It's like we planned it or something.

Speaking of surreal, in the future I hope to do a story where Duckman awakes one morning from troubled sleep to discover that he's become a large pot roast.

MARK: *Yum! Craig Yoe's style seemed much like that of an underground comic.*

STEFAN: Absolutely! I was incredibly pleased when I saw the published version, and the thing I loved most about it was that, to me, it read like an old underground (minus, of course, the drug references and throbbing genitalia). Due in large part to Craig's work, NAKED DUCK has a gritty, irreverent feel that really gives the satire graphic teeth.

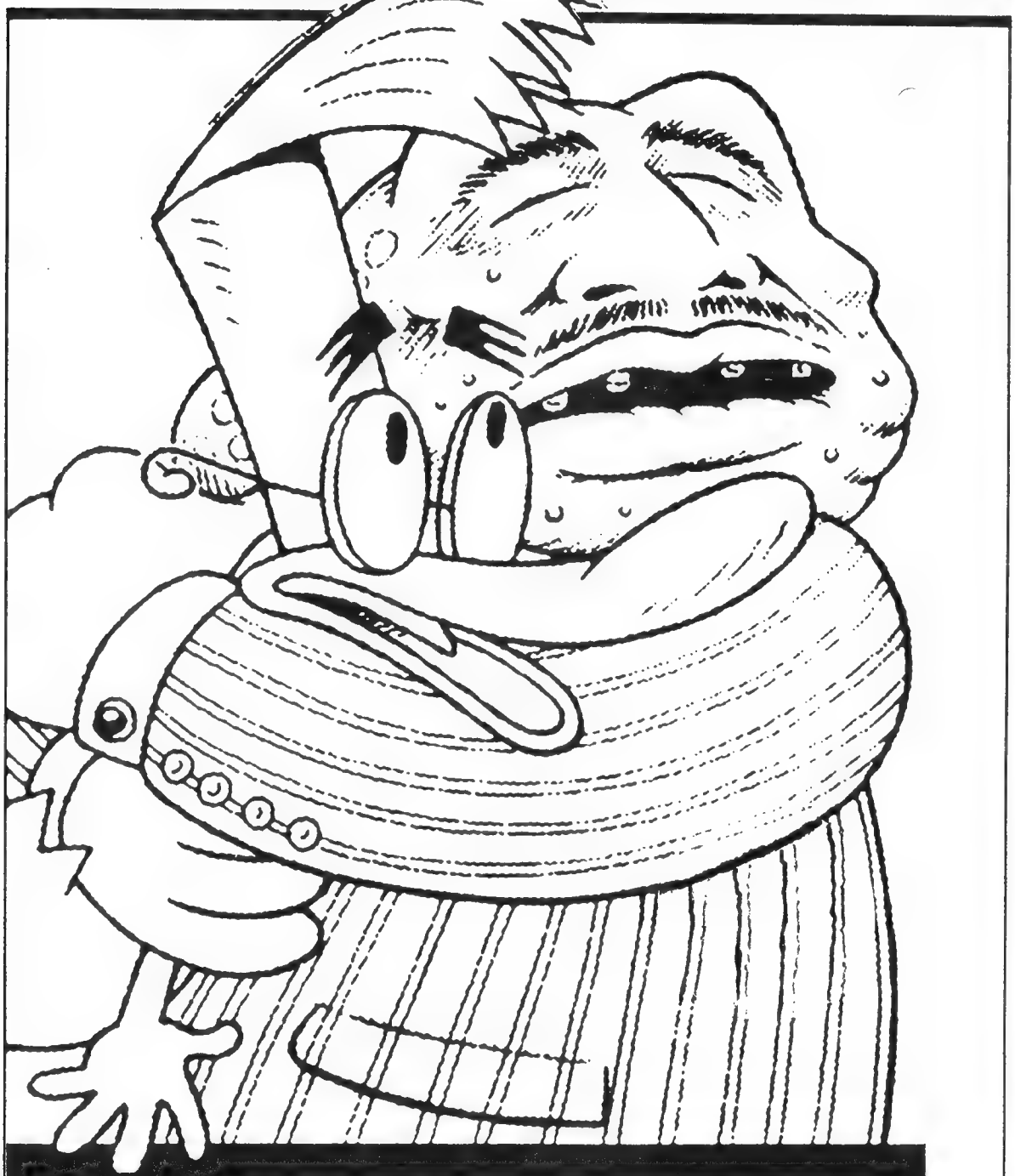
MARK: *To write something as satirical and often as lewd as DUCKMAN, you must have a pretty good sense of humor.*

STEFAN: Why yes, Mark, I'm *incredibly* funny.

Anyway, as a form, satire is a marvelous tool. Part of the goal is to replicate the object of the satire — so you wind up analyzing and figuring out just what makes the original, aka the object of the satire, tick. As a mode of expression, its also a great catch-all for that placeless anger and frustration one feels against society and the world. When one assumes that things should make sense, of course everything's going to look absurd!

I've been doing satire in one way or another for as long as I can remember. It started in college, in the late seventies, when I wrote and directed a series of video tape satires. The first was a satire of CHARLIE'S ANGELS, called CHADWICK'S AIRHEADS, and involved a plot to assassinate our college president. It became something of a "thing" on campus, so naturally we did sequels. The second, AFTERNOON OF THE AIRHEADS was a **George Romero**/NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD spoof in which I got to deflate a few heads on camera and blow up a few model buildings. Next came **Chadwick's** AIRHEADS THE MOTION PICTURE, which had, literally, a cast of several hundred. It satirized STAR TREK, STAR WARS, LORD OF THE RINGS, THE PRISONER, PLANET OF THE APES, and lots more. Looking back, though, I think some of my relationships with women during my college days hold up as

"I think Duckp[illegible]resents the next



THE MOB FROG SAGA

my funniest work. If only I'd gotten a piece of the licensing!

I find something very refreshing about mocking things, freeing. Working on DUCKMAN satisfies those urges very nicely, while THE X-FILES lets me explore my more serious, pseudo-mystical side.

MARK: *Issue #2 featured an X-FILES take-off, and #6 a STAR TREK one. Is this to broaden the appeal?*

STEFAN: Um, actually #2 was ROBO-DUCK, another satire, sort of. The X-FILES satire, called, "The XXX Files," seemed a natural, given the fact that I'm

step towards hyper-real talking animals."

writing the monthly. We'd hope to release it along with X-FILES #1, but various delays have screwed up the schedule, so I'm not sure exactly when that issue will ship.

Satire and DUCKMAN is a natural. The book just can't be done without *some* satire, but generally the storylines are so off the wall and meandering by nature that it's nice to peg down a theme. If you look at the stories themselves, they stand up nicely on their own as well. NAKED LUNCH has a lot of **Burroughs** references, but isn't a direct satire, per se. Same with "XXX Files" — I play with the themes in an interesting way but, for example, Mulder and Scully don't appear.

Doing STAR TREK, however, is an out and out desperate cry for attention, circulation wise. I should also point out that it's hysterical, covering the whole history of the STAR TREK phenomenon in broad, highly irreverent strokes.

MARK: *Just what kind of audience are you aiming for? DUCKMAN isn't for everyone . . .*

STEFAN: It's not? Damn!

Obviously, if you like the show, I'd hope you'd like the comic, but beyond that, I guess we're aiming for that sort of literate, smart crowd that's got their fingers on the throbbing pulse of society and popular culture, yet still casts a wry eye at the world.

Having been surprised one time too many by the age and gender of various correspondents on e-mail, I would never peg it to a particular age or social group. Anyone who enjoys humor, laughing out loud, particularly at the sort of off the wall stuff we've seen on the air lately, would be into DUCKMAN, both comic and show.

I'd like to take a moment here to say that I hate the phrase "off the wall" — but can't come up with anything more descriptive.

MARK: *What inspired the simultaneous DUCKMAN mini-series, THE MOB FROG SAGA?*

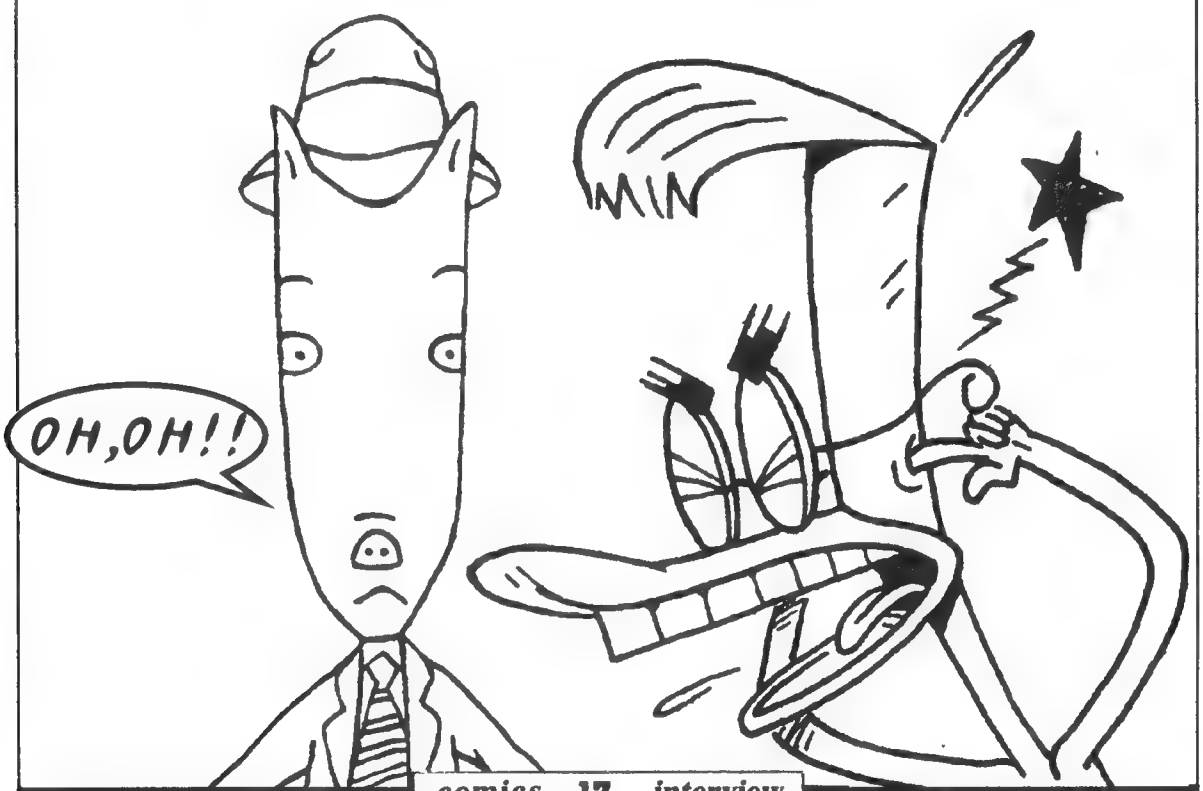
STEFAN: The MOB FROG plot was part of those original storyboards I submitted. Jim felt the story was particularly suited to the mini-series format. At the time, the only books that were breaking into the top 100 were the animated adaptations, BEAVIS & BUTTHEAD, etc. So it seemed wise to launch the D-ster with a two-headed punch.

I'm pleased to say that both book and mini-series have a different feel. With **Jay Lynch's** work on MOB FROG, we've got cleaner lines and finer detail — almost like a Warner Bros. cartoon — so we're sort of coming at Duckman from the other direction there — and it works every bit as well. I still crack up whenever I see Jay's **Marlon Brando** Mob Frog — or that little fly in the connecting sequences. The folks at the TV show were particularly pleased with Mob Frog.

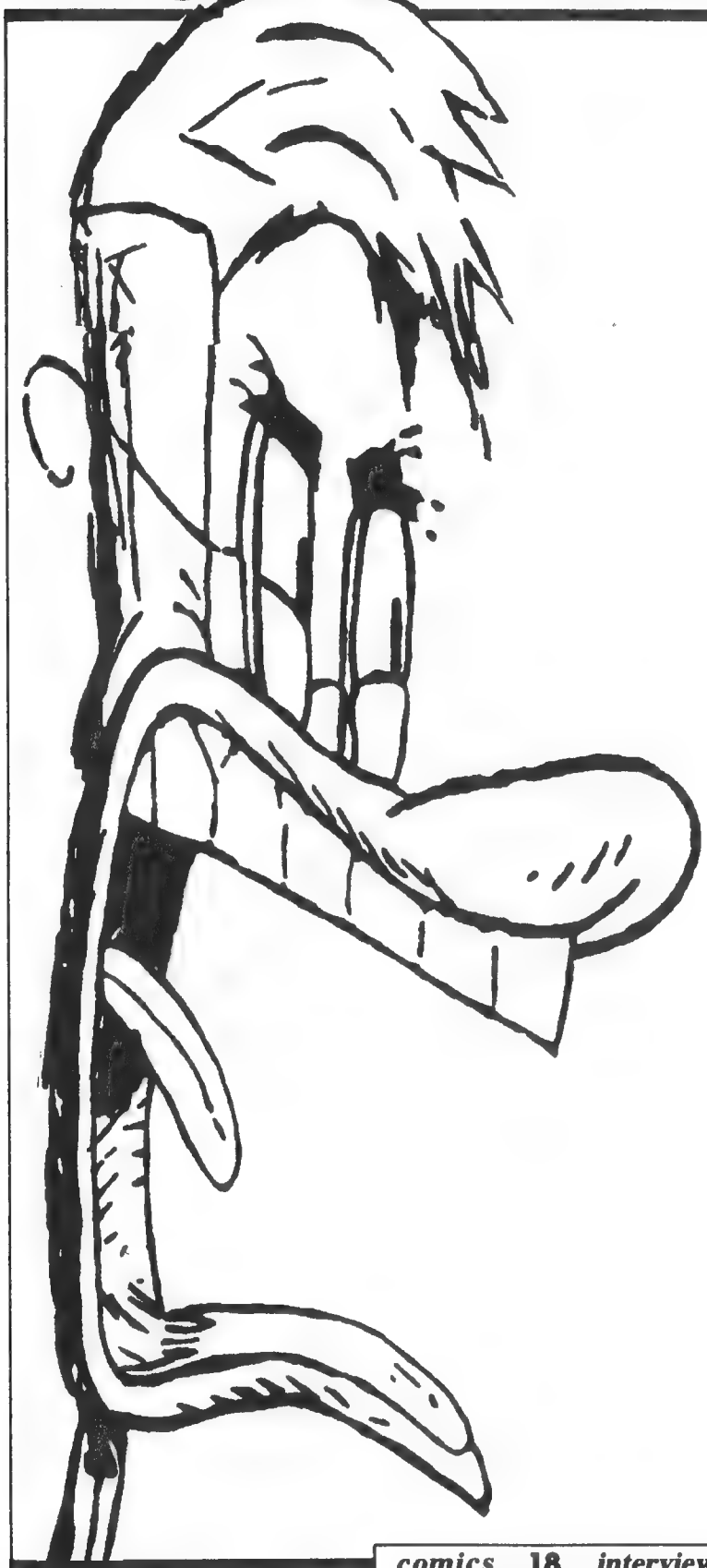
MARK: *Duckman has an attitude not unlike other Type A ducks. Is there a similarity or influence between him and Daffy Duck and/or Howard the Duck?*

STEFAN: And Donald for that matter. Yeah, what is it about ducks that makes people think they're tense? Probably that annoying quacking noise they make. It *sounds* like they're yelling, ranting. And they're *always* secondary. I mean, Donald's second fiddle to Mickey, Daffy's second fiddle to Bugs. No wonder the ducks are so angry. But yes, there is a certain disastisfaction to all those characters.

Daffy and Donald always seem to be badly wanting something they can't get. They're always on the outs with the world, so to speak. In some ways, Duckman is closer to **Steve Gerber's** Howard the Duck, but Howard had this sort of intense nobility. Its the world that's berserk, selfish and Howard was the good guy trying to do the right thing.



"Doing th[illegible]ght thing is, for him, often



I think Duckman represents the next step towards hyper-real talking animals. Doing the right thing is, for him, often the second, third, or fourth thought. He's got that uninhibited Daffy greed, coupled with Donald's temper. At the same time though, he enjoys none of their immortal powers. Duckman, clearly, cannot have his beak blown off by a shotgun and survive. He's got a real dead wife, kids who don't understand him (and whom he doesn't understand), a partner he abuses, interns he tortures, and some very deep-seated coping problems. His needs and his fantasies are less generalized than those of his predecessors, more real, more recognizeable in this moden post-industrial world. He has to make a living, he has to return to Beatrice every night, he has to have a relationship with his kids. *Of course,* he longs for freedom, sex, and cash.

Mice — now, mice have it easy . . .

MARK: *How does your book differ from the TV series? What are you intentionally doing differently?*

STEFAN: Hopefully, other than the fact that the pictures don't move by themselves, there is no real difference. I have a lot of respect for the show — they've done some really interesting television, and I'm happily emulating them. Naturally, Duckman's views in the comic are to some extent my own, filtered through his character, but I don't really think there's a fundamental difference there.

MARK: *Is there anything you can't do in the comic? Has USA or Everett Peck put any restrictions on you?*

STEFAN: Not really. There was some minor stuff, like don't have Duckman firing a gun or killing anyone, except by accident, but other than that, rather than restrictions, there's been tremendous support from Everett and the Duckpeople — including an enjoinder to "push the envelope," and some very helpful suggestions that improved various scenes in the stories.

MARK: *Do you have desires to script DUCKMAN episodes for TV?*

STEFAN: Yes, absolutely. In fact, I've been in touch with the writing staff. They were very pleased with the initial issues, and I'm hopeful that I'll be asked to pitch some story ideas for scripts this coming March. They're waiting to hear about their next renewal, which given all the rave reviews and the fact that USA is putting some marketing elbow behind the show, is a pretty good bet. The quality's there — it's just a question of enough people finding the show (and the comic) to make it a hit.

the second, third, or fourth thought."

MARK: *After over ten years of trying to break into comics, do you feel you've finally "made it"?*

STEFAN: Yes and no — and I'm no longer sure what the question means. It's funny, but in a way, I felt as though I'd "made it" at that moment I discussed at the beginning of the interview — a year or so ago when I decided to abandon comics for a while and work on a novel. That experience reaffirmed my connection to the writing process — without editors or deadlines or businesses going under.

What occurred to me then was that my commitment to writing had *survived* — published or not, I'll always be writing. I just get too much out of it on a personal and, yes, spiritual level, for me to ever abandon the process. Work comes and goes, fame is fleeting — but those aren't the only goals; in fact, they're not even the most important. That realization felt really good — and I've been more comfortable in my own skin ever since. Of course, next month I had to pay bills, and it faded like a bad dream, but I still remember it now and then — fondly.

Have I made it? I have a body of work I'm proud of, that many people have enjoyed reading. I'm the regular writer on two books that fulfill two distinct aspects of my talents. I have next month's rent. So, yes. But I also remember feeling exactly the same way when I was writing SQUALOR and META-4 for First — and I'm also keenly aware that in a year this could all be gone.

I dunno, X-FILES and DUCKMAN are more visible than anything I've done, so I could well be flooded with offers and enough work to last a decade, but "making it" implies that I've arrived at a place I can stay at. I've made it, I'm "done" — that implication of permanence doesn't jibe with the experience. It feels more like I'm here now and I may as well enjoy it while I can.

MARK: *Will we ever see META-4 again? What is it about that series that has it so fondly recalled, almost a decade later?*

STEFAN: Thanks for mentioning it. That's the series folks who know my work seem to remember the most fondly. I think it had a lot of the same appeal as THE X-FILES — exploring that nether realm between science and belief, all those anomalies that we know and love. The fact that it had a much more whimsical tone in part, allowed it to explore

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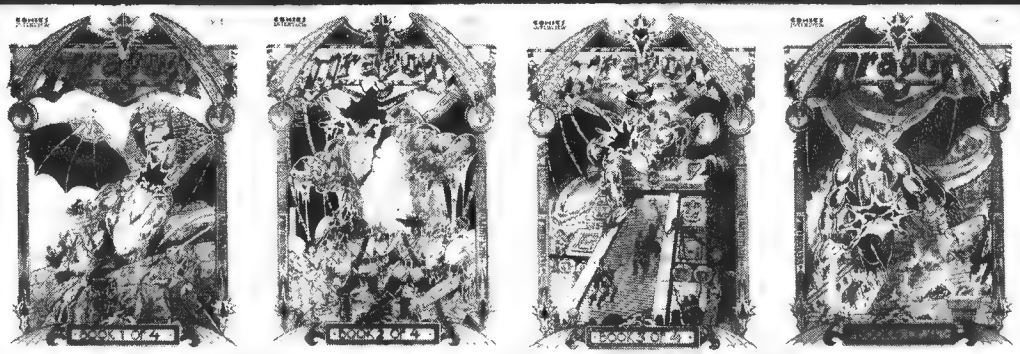

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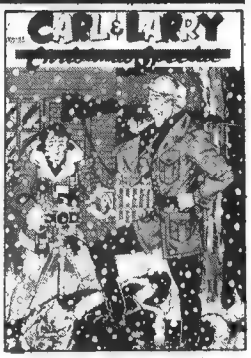

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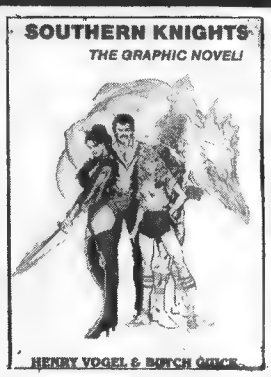

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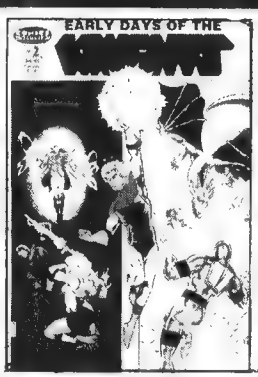

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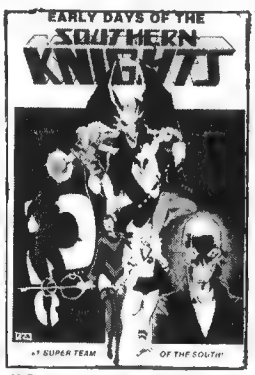

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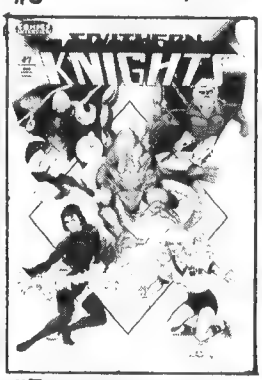

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"X-FILES and DUCKMAN are more visible than anything I've done."

some of the aspects of the New Age that might seem absurd even for Mulder and Scully. It was also very much a superhero book — and the crossing of the genres made for some great stories.

Superheroes are basically about people who can do things the rest of us can't — and so are all those New Age books. The difference being, the latter are purportedly for real. It was a natural, I thought, and if First hadn't gone under, I think it would have built quite an audience. Will it return? I hope so.

MARK: *What advice would you give aspiring creators who are trying to break into the field?*

STEFAN: I dunno, there are so many issues, and ultimately as many different ways of breaking in as there are creators. I mean, sometimes I'm still not sure if *I've* broken in. Have I got work now? Sure. If it vanishes tomorrow can I dial a number and get more work? I don't think so.

If you want to get rich, become a doctor or a banker. If you want to be famous — kill a lot of people in an interesting way, or kill one interesting person in a dull way. If all you absolutely ever want to do is work in comics, get an internship, work in the offices, get to know people. If you want to be an artist or a writer or a creator — develop incredibly good taste, then do work you like. If you're not enjoying yourself — something's wrong.

Past that, I don't really know. I'd like to say, don't ever give up, but as soon as I gave up, I had my biggest success.

MARK: *Is Duckman you? Do you empathize with this put-upon character?*

STEFAN: To an extent — but I'm also Cornfed and Bernice and Ajax, and Charles and Mambo and Mulder and Scully. In fact, it's pretty damn crowded in here. I don't believe I'm King Chicken, but I'm not sure.

Ultimately, Duckman is very much an everyman and/or woman. I don't think anyone goes through life with happiness and understanding handed to them. I think we all walk long paths to achieve those things, and en route we encounter various frustrations from without and within. At those moments when the frustrations match or surmount our will to continue — we are all Duckman.

MARK: *What's the future hold for DUCKMAN?*

STEFAN: Well, I've still got a bunch of springboards raring to go, and I'm hopeful that the new season starting in March

"If you want to be famous — kill a lot of people in an interesting way, or kill one interesting person in a dull way."

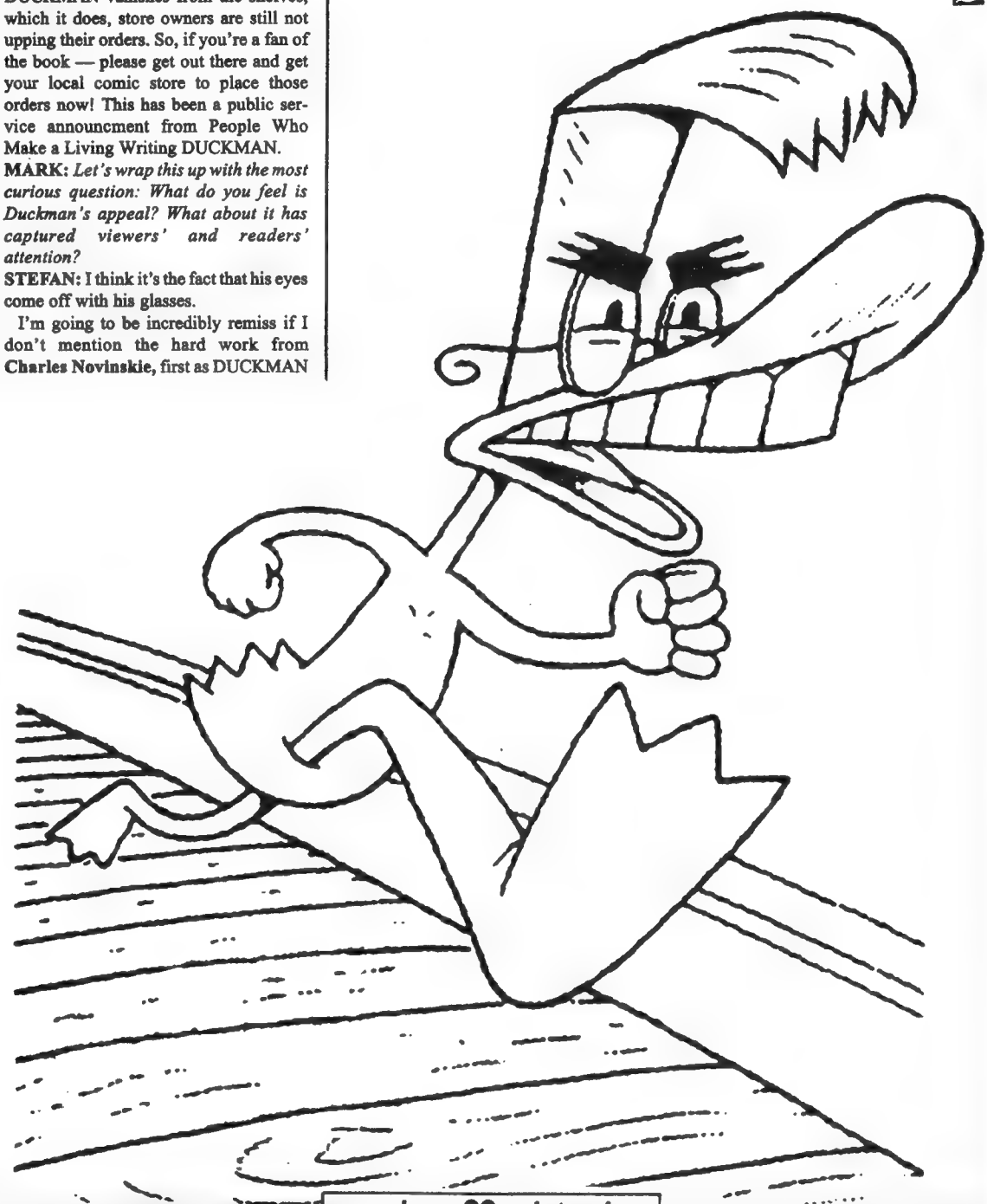
on USA will help circulation. Right now there's a planned reprint of **Everett Peck's** original Duckman comics, which should be a hoot, and I'll be writing at least one more issue. But we are in a depressed market, and retailers are not willing to take many risks. Even if DUCKMAN vanishes from the shelves, which it does, store owners are still not upping their orders. So, if you're a fan of the book — please get out there and get your local comic store to place those orders now! This has been a public service announcment from People Who Make a Living Writing DUCKMAN.

MARK: *Let's wrap this up with the most curious question: What do you feel is Duckman's appeal? What about it has captured viewers' and readers' attention?*

STEFAN: I think it's the fact that his eyes come off with his glasses.

I'm going to be incredibly remiss if I don't mention the hard work from **Charles Novinskie,** first as DUCKMAN editor, now as publicity director. He's been fantastic, responsive, and responsible from Day One. I should also say hi to **Renee Witterstaeter,** the new DUCKMAN editor, though we haven't worked together much as of yet. Hi!

Lastly, Topps, under the wise stewardship of **Jim Salicrup,** is a vastly underrated company that produces a true rarity — fun, high quality comics. I hope lots more people figure this out — and that they'll be around for a long time to come.



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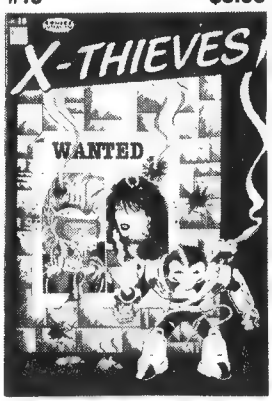

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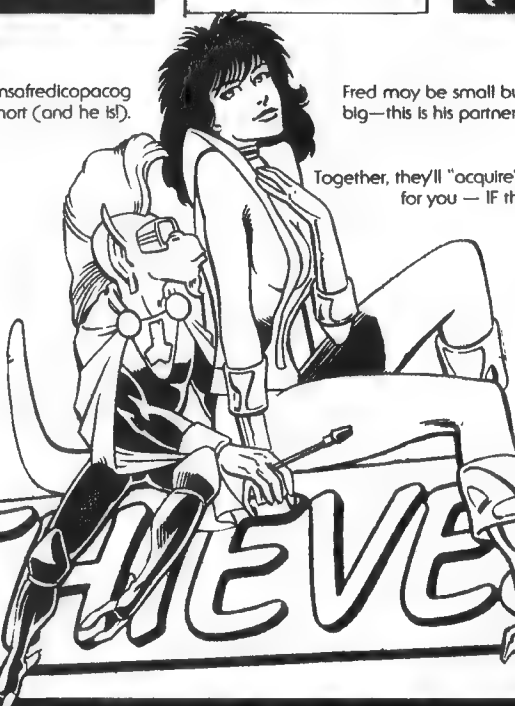

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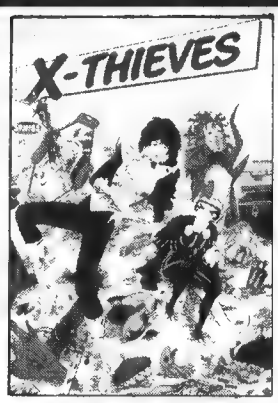

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"If Marvel wants to do a sequel to MARVELS,

Kurt Busiek, thanks to writing MARVELS, has become an overnight sensation after 12 years in the business.

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"Image was offering me interesting stuff, wanting me to bring a different style."

KURT BUSIEK

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then terrific — let's see what they can do."

LOU MOUGIN: *I guess first off, I'd like to hear about your upcoming work with Image. Can you give me some details on that?*

KURT: Sure. I'm doing a bunch of different things for Image. It was kind of strange that after MARVELS came out, I didn't get all that much in the way of offers from the major companies. I did a few issues of VALOR, I'm doing NIGHT THRASHER. But largely at a time when the industry is focused on "How can we do more books the way Image is doing? How can we get bigger, bolder, cooler art, nasty guys?" — the calls I got from Image were, "We really like what you did on MARVELS, and we would like you to do that sort of thing for us." And they didn't mean, "We want you to do 'IMAGES.' *(Laughter.)* We want you to do a fully-painted human's-eye-view of the Image universe." What they meant was, "We want somebody who can write that kind of level of character and humanity and drama, and bring that touch to the Image Universe." Now, they already have the big bad guys with the big knives and the nasty squints. They wanted to do more. So Image was the company that was offering me the most interesting stuff, in terms of wanting me to exercise the same kind of muscles I exercised with MARVELS and to bring a different style to what they publish.

LOU: *So you're going to be doing SHADOWHAWK with Jim Valentino?*

KURT: Actually, I'm doing two projects with **Jim Valentino** at the moment. I'm doing SHADOWHAWK: IMAGES OF TOMORROW, which is sort of like the "Issue #25" issues of things like STORMWATCH and BRIGADE. It's a special that takes a look at Shadow-Hawk's future, jumping ahead to a period where — well, we tell an interesting story, but there are an awful lot of hints there as to the fact that a great deal has changed.

I'm also doing a six-issue series for Jim called THE REGULATORS that picks up a group of super villains who have been running through the SHADOWHAWK series and spins them out into their own book. Jim wanted to do a book about villains. Not about villains acting as heroes, not a book about villains deciding to protect the world because it's their world, too, but a book about villains pulling crimes and, if, after a successful robbery, they go for drugs and hookers, then we wanna see that. And this is a time-honored genre in crime fiction, but it's not something we see in comics. So I couldn't resist an offer like that. It's going to be six issues. **Kerry Gammill** is going to be doing the artwork. I've worked out the whole story and finished the first issue. And I think it's gonna be a lot of fun.

LOU: *You're also going to be working on YOUNGBLOOD. Who's going to be the artist on that one?*

KURT: Rob Liefeld.

LOU: *Rob Liefeld! Of course.*

KURT: I'm doing a YOUNGBLOOD: YEAR ONE arc of issues that explore the beginning of Youngblood. Not only how the team got put together, but *why* the team got put together.

LOU: *Which will be a great help for those of us who don't have any idea.*

KURT: Yes. But the thing that I wanted to bring to that was that I didn't simply want to tell the origin of the team and say, "It's a team like the Avengers, it's a team like the X-Men." Because it's not. I wanted to get into why Youngblood is unique, why it is a team that isn't like any other team out there. So, basically, YOUNGBLOOD: YEAR ONE, while it has a lot of superhero activity, splashy art, and action, is really a Washington political novel with punching and hitting in it. It's about power games in Washington. It's sort of like a **Tom Clancy** novel with superheroes in it.

LOU: *A CLEAR AND PRESENT SUPERHERO.*

KURT: Yes, as various powers in Washington attempt to make sure they stay in

"I'm doing a project for Erik Larsen, so I am doing

power or gain added power. And the control of superheroes is important to the power game.

LOU: *And the other two things you've got, VELOCITY and SPARTAN —*

KURT: So far.

LOU: (Laughter.) *And if this follows, Todd cannot be far behind! Just kidding.*

KURT: VELOCITY and SPARTAN, and we've got other projects in the works. A BADROCK AND SHAFT painted graphic album, and I was just recently down there at the Homage Studios office, and we were talking about some other stuff that might come up. And I'm doing a project for **Erik Larsen,** so at the moment I am doing work for all of the Image owners except for Todd. And Todd and I haven't talked yet, so . . . *(Laughter.)*

SPARTAN is a four-issue mini-series focusing on the leader of the WildCATs, getting into the essence of the character. He's a noble-soldier warrior-spirit in a completely artificial android body. But as an android, he's not the Vision, he's not the Red Tornado. This is a series about what he *is,* and why he is that way. I want to get into his personality, and what has formed him. Not so much into his origins, although we'll be revealing a little more about his origins than has been shown up to this point, but more into his character. Taking him out of the team allows us to focus on him, sort of put him in the crucible and see what comes out. This involves Spartan in Tibet, dealing with a

THE SAVAGE DRAGON & RICOCHET TM & © Erik Larsen

work for all of the Image owners except Todd."

Previous page: Unseen art from another of Kurt's future collaborators, Erik Larsen — layouts and loose pencils from the first issue of THE SAVAGE DRAGON (above/below). This page, a piece of Silvestri's CYBERFORCE history — by Walter "STAR SLAMMERS" Simonson. This, the rare pencils from the ad promoting the #0 issue, also written by Walt, from 1993. For those of you who aren't familiar with Marc's group (and this isn't all of 'em), they are Impact, Stryker, Heatwave, Cyblade & Ripclaw.

scientific investigation into computer-controlled magic. Ancient demonic forces and high-tech raiders who want to take over this scientific project. And romance and action, and lots of trouble.

LOU: *All that good stuff.*

KURT: All that good kind of stuff. The WildCATs will appear in it, but Spartan's the focus.

LOU: *Well, I'm glad to hear this, since one of my problems with Image has been the throwing-together of a bunch of teams whose individual members you have a heck of a time finding out about from what we're given.*

KURT: The explanations about those members have been coming along. There's been a great deal of focus on Zealot in WILDCATS; we know a lot about her. And there's been a good deal of focus on Grifter, and we don't know a great deal about him, but we're coming to know about him. Back in the 1960s, it was traditional that you knew everything about everybody right from issue #1. In the'90s, it seems to be that we show the team, and then you drop back for origin stories.

LOU: *Yeah, "We'll fill you in as we go along."*

KURT: Yeah. And that's been going on in CYBERFORCE, in FREAK FORCE, and in WILDCATS. We're getting filled in on who the characters are. I'm just getting to focus on a couple of them, Spartan and,. from CYBERFORCE,

"I read comics off and on when I was quite young.

Velocity.

The thing that immediately attracted me to Velocity, aside from the fact that she's really cute, is that she's apparently vulnerable, which is a different kind of thing for modern superheroes. She's always scared; she's always worried. She is not tough. She's the antithesis of tough. And in going through the material so far, I've found that she's never thrown a punch. She carries messages, she spies on people, she runs from place to place. When she was mentally controlled by somebody, she almost stabbed somebody else with a sword. But the closest she came to an aggressive action under her own control was when she wrapped some robot with a rope around his leg so that he fell down. *(Laughter.)*

But her instinct is to run away from trouble rather than to confront it. So this series focuses on, "How come she do dat?" *(Laughter.)* Why is there a superhero in this whose main function is to flee?

LOU: *Sounds like common sense to me.*

KURT: Well, common sense it is. But you wonder what it is that drives her, why she has this instinct, and what she can do about it. And now that she's on her own, in her own mini-series, how's she gonna accomplish anything if all she does is run away? So she not only has to face a very major, very powerful, very deadly and violent villain, but she has to face her own inner demons that force her to be scared all the time.

LOU: *Well, I think it's time we dropped back and got an origin story on yourself, now. Can you tell me something about your journey from fan to fanzine writer to comic-book writer? And do not fail to mention THE BATTLE OF LEXINGTON!*

KURT: *(Laughter.)* Oh, let's fail to mention that! Okay, I read comics off and on when I was quite young. Never much, because my parents didn't allow them in the house. I didn't actually start reading comics on a regular basis until I was 13 years old, in 1974.

LOU: *That means you were born in 1962?*

KURT: No, 1960. And I started reading comics, I started reading DAREDEVIL. The first DAREDEVIL I picked up was part one of a four-part story, and by the time I had read all four parts, I had found the local comic-book store and I had started picking up back issues of DAREDEVIL and X-MEN and TEEN TITANS. Very early on, I realized that the career I was heading for, a computer programmer, was not a career that was going to keep me interested. It was very interesting stuff to learn, but not necessarily interesting to do. Because at a lot of companies, while learning to be a computer programmer is like learning to be a high-wire trapeze artist, actually, programming for the needs of a particular company is like being a crossing guard. They want you to use only one portion of those skills you've learned and do it over and over and over and over and over again. There are some jobs where you get to exercise those creative muscles, but there are a lot where you don't.

And I realized early on that wasn't what I wanted to do with my life, and that people got paid for writing comic books, and that sounded like a lot of fun. So I started learning whatever I could about writing comics. Talking to other comics fans, picking up whatever I could, taking writing courses, and so on. Around that time, I got my friend **Scott McCloud** reading comics.

LOU: *So you're responsible for Scott McCloud reading comics!*

KURT: Yeah, Scott was convinced that comics were for kids; comics were too stupid for somebody as smart as a 14-year-old like him!

LOU: *Riiight!*

KURT: Or maybe he was 15 at the time. So I gave him a complete run of the original X-MEN, and said, "Look, read these." And by the time he was up to about issue #34, or whatever, he was hooked. So yes, it's all my fault!

LOU: *So, without you, we wouldn't have*

A blast from the past: THE BATTLE OF LEXINGTON — Kurt's and then-schoolmate Scott McCloud's early collaboration. Kurt: "A more mindless piece of comics would be hard to find."

My parents didn't allow them in the house."

GREEN LANTERN & GREEN LANTERN CORPS TM & ©1994 DC Comics, Inc.

I COULD SEE NO OTHER COURSE OF ACTION TO TAKE--AND STILL CANNOT.
I STAND READY TO ACCEPT YOUR JUDGEMENT
WE UNDERSTAND YOUR GOOD INTENTIONS, AND SHARE YOUR SORROWS AT THE REBULTS OF YOUR ACTIONS.
BUT OUR JUDGEMENT, ALAS, IS CLEAR.
YOU HAVE VIOLATED OUR CODE--AND MUST GIVE UP YOUR RING!
W-WHAT??
BUT I HAD TO SAVE THEM! COULD I LET THEM DIE?

From GREEN LANTERN #162, "The Price You Pay!" — Busiek's first pro job. Art by Howell & Trapani.

UNDERSTANDING COMICS.

KURT: And you wouldn't have ZOT!.

LOU: *Right, exactly.*

KURT: And you wouldn't have 24-hour comics, and . . .

I take all the credit. It was all me, me, me! I did it all.

LOU: *And we wouldn't have THE BATTLE OF LEXINGTON! Tell them something about that.*

KURT: Okay . . . While Scott and I were in high school, we knew we wanted to do comics. So we wrote and drew our own comic book. A sixty-page slugfest with five superheroes and five other superheroes beating the crap out of each other at our high school and destroying most of our home town. And it was catharsis, it was fun, and along the way we kind of learned what we were doing. The early pages are completely incoherent, but by the end of the story, we were actually *telling* a story, concerned with characterization and emotion and plot — not that there *was* any — and stuff like that there. So THE BATTLE OF LEXINGTON was where Scott and I both learned how to do comics.

LOU: *And if you have a page left, I certainly hope you send a xerox of it to use with the interview.*

KURT: Not a chance! *(Laughter.)* After high school, we both went to the same

"The major thrill there is working with Kirby

college, Syracuse University. We worked on comics that were supposed to be published by New Media in a magazine that never got off the ground.

LOU: *Was that ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED?*

KURT: No, they were going to do a magazine called RISING STAR, which was going to be a sister magazine to ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED and FANTASY ILLUSTRATED that featured the work of new talent. But I wrote and edited for New Media on COMICS FEATURE and LOC. And before graduation from college, Scott landed a job working in DC's production department, and I sold a six-page "Tales of the Green Lantern Corps" script to **Ernie Colón.**

LOU: *Which issue was that in?*

KURT: Uhhhh . . . let me see . . . GREEN LANTERN #162. It was the famous "kid-exploding-in-deep-space" cover. Nobody wrote in about anything but the cover. *(Laughter.)* But shortly after that, I started writing POWER MAN AND IRON FIST, and The Rest Is History.

LOU: *It's been about eight, nine years from the first Green Lantern Corps story up to now?*

KURT: That GREEN LANTERN issue and my first issue of POWER MAN AND IRON FIST both came out in December of 1982. So it's actually eleven years and counting. Twelve since my first sale.

LOU: *Can you tell me something about working on the Kirbyverse stuff for Topps?*

KURT: That's been a lot of fun. It hasn't sold as well as I'd have liked it to, but I've gotten the chance to work with **Neil Volkes** and **James Fry** and **Keith Giffen.** And the major thrill there is getting to

Busiek, Giffen & Palmiotti teamed up on this, the second issue of Topps Comics' VICTORY. Read on . . .

VICTORY (& CAPTAIN VICTORY) ©1994 Roz & Jack Kirby

characters before anybody else has gotten to."

work with **Jack Kirby** characters before anybody else has gotten to them. I mean, it would be a lot of fun to do, say, the NEW GODS at DC. But the New Gods have met the Justice League, and have gone through adventures where they've been shaped more towards superheroes, and then they've been sort of shaped back towards the **Kirby** version, and a lot of people have put their thumbprints on the New Gods, aside from **Kirby.**

Even characters like Devil Dinosaur. I love Devil Dinosaur. But Devil was part of a mutant team for awhile, by **Jo Duffy** and **Kerry Gammill,** and **Joe Staton,** and they did a wonderful job, but there's still nothing that can quite compare with being handed notes and sketches by **Jack Kirby** and told, "Okay, it's all yours. You are the first guy to do it."

LOU: *That must have been quite an experience.*

KURT: It was quite an experience. And working with Neil, working with James, working with Keith, they all bring a lot of creative energy to whatever they do. They were all jazzed about the idea of working on **Kirby** concepts.

There is a different thrill to working on concepts of your own creation, of course. And certainly, if any of us were to emulate **Jack Kirby,** we would do it by creating our own characters. Jack wasn't out there going, "Oh, man, if I could only do TERRY AND THE PIRATES!" *(Laughter.)* Jack made up his own stuff. And when he couldn't do that particular stuff anymore, he made up *more* of his own stuff. So I would certainly like to concentrate on doing characters of my own creation. But if somebody's gonna offer me the chance to work on **Kirby** characters, I'm sure not gonna say no.

LOU: *Right. When I was looking through your* precis *here in COMIC-BOOK SUPERSTARS, I noticed a couple of credits for MICKEY MOUSE and JELL-O MAN! Can you tell me something about that?*

KURT: Well, to give a quick time-line here, first I was a freelancer working for Marvel and DC. And I wasn't making any real money doing that. So **Jim Salicrup** offered me a job working as the assistant editor on MARVEL AGE, on which I still wasn't making any real money, but at least I wasn't making it on a regular basis. I did that for about a year. Then I was a literary agent for a while, during which time I was still freelancing for whoever I could do stuff for, including DC Comics and Eclipse, where **James Fry** and I created THE LIBERTY PROJECT. Then I co-created OPEN SPACE with **Carol Kalish,** and Carol hired me to work in the direct sales department as direct sales manager and as editor of OPEN SPACE. I did that for a while. After OPEN SPACE was cancelled, I had enough freelance work to go freelance again. So I moved out here to the West Coast, and have been steadily freelancing ever since. I've been lucky enough to be very busy.

And, the character on which VICTORY is based: Jack Kirby's Captain Victory. Possibly, this was to have been a pin-up.

But when I started freelancing, I was doing everything. I was writing issues of WHAT IF? for Marvel. I wrote one MICKEY MOUSE story for Disney. I wrote VAMPIRELLA for Harris Comics and relaunched that series. So I would sometimes in the course of a day shift from *(doing absolutely perfect Mickey Mouse voice),* "Uh, hey, Pluto! Look out!" *(Laughter.)* to, uh, blood-smeared

"I wrote one Mickey Mouse story, which was difficult."

VAMPIRELLA® Harris Publications, Inc.
NO! STAY BACK!
THOOM!
SHE WAS ALWAYS THE TOP GIRL IN SCHOOL. THE LEADER. THE COOL ONE. ALL THE OTHERS LOOKED UP TO HER.
BUT IT WAS JUST A POSE, SHE WANTS TO SHOUT. IT WAS JUST A POSE!
THOOM!
INSIDE, I WAS JUST THE SAME AS THEY WERE! I'M JUST A LITTLE GIRL! IT DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING!
OH, BUT IT DID, CHELSEA!
YOU WANTED POWER, CHELSEA-- AND YOU REACHED OUT AND TOUCHED IT.
THOOM
YOU STILL WANT POWER. YOU STILL WANT TO BE TOP GIRL.
YOU WANT TO BE THE TOP GIRL FOREVER -- AND I WANT TO HELP YOU.
THUD
LET ME GIVE YOU THE POWER, CHELSEA!
IT'LL BE WONDERFUL, CHELSEA. YOU'LL LOVE IT -- ONCE YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE.
NO, SHE WANTS TO SCREAM!
I'M JUST A KID -- A LITTLE GIRL!
BUT SHE STUMBLES, AND SHE KNOWS IT'LL REACH HER BEFORE SHE CAN GET UP--
...NO!

A page from VAMPIRELLA: MORNING IN AMERICA by Kurt. Infantino pencilled, with Nyberg on inks.

vampires stalking through the night in search of victims.

LOU: *I certainly hope we don't see Black Pete in any of those background scenes in VAMPIRELLA!*

KURT: I think that would be fun! Wouldn't that be sweet?

LOU: *It would be.*

KURT: So I actually wrote one Mickey Mouse story, which was difficult to write, because all of my training has been in focusing on character and emotion as a means of advancing plot. And Mickey is a very, very minimal character. He's a very nice guy, but Disney doesn't really seem to want him to be all that distinctive. They want him to be an Everyman that any kid can identify with. So I had to focus much more on explaining plot and keeping the character moving along, but not being as distinct and individual as I would have liked to make him, being a big fan of the **Floyd Gottfredson** Mickey Mouse.

LOU: *In other words, Mickey's been*

"Mickey has a personality; he's not completely generic."

pretty much genericked down by now.

KURT: Not genericked down, but sort of made more minimal. Mickey has a personality; he's not completely generic. But it is a much calmer personality than he used to be.

I also wrote a four-issue mini-series for Disney based on a video game called FINAL FANTASY. It never came out. But writing those four issues was an interesting editorial challenge, because halfway through writing it the video game company changed the concept around completely for their next wave of games. And not only were the characters I was using not available anymore, not even the *country* still existed. It was a completely different map, a completely different technology. But it was an interesting challenge, fitting it all together into an exciting adventure story.

LOU: *At least an experience, if nothing else.*

KURT: Right. "That which does not kill us, makes us stronger."

LOU: *Especially if they pay us a kill fee for it.*

KURT: Actually, I managed to get the last pages for issue #4 sent in about three days before they killed the project. So I did not lose out on any money.

LOU: *That's good. Okay, I guess it's been a long haul for you over the last twelve years, but it's certainly paid off with a big batch of award nominations. Did MARVELS manage to cop some of those awards?*

KURT: Yes. As a matter of fact, MARVELS has picked up ten awards that I know of so far. In the Heroes World Distribution retailer show, MARVELS got four awards. These are distribution-oriented awards. It picked up Product of the Year Award, Breakthrough Product of the Year 1993 — I'm not sure what the difference is between those two, but there is some sort of difference. And two others that I'm not sure what they were named. Best Original Concept might've been one. But you could check with Heroes World and find out what they were. Those plaques went right to Marvel, so I don't actually have them to know what they are.

LOU: *Aw, shucks!*

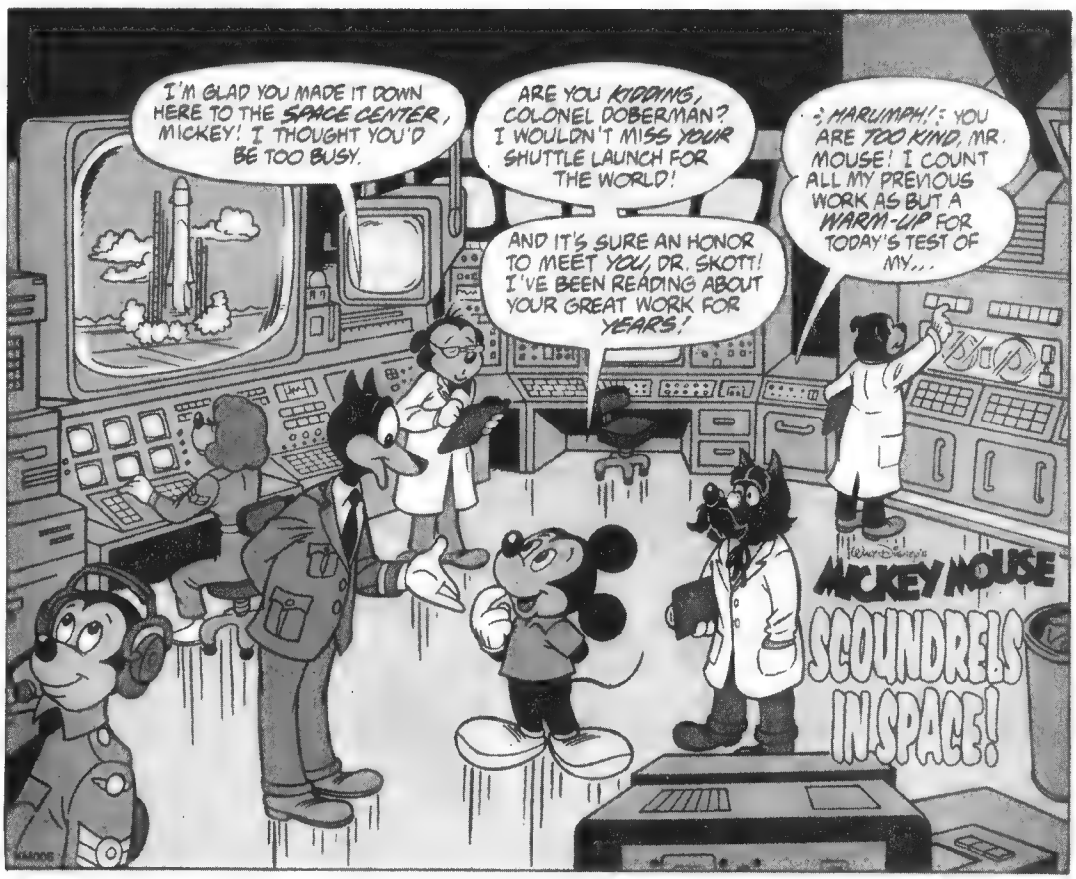
KURT: At the Harvey Awards in Dallas, we won Best Series. Limited Series, Best Artist, and Special Award for Excellence in Presentation. And at the Eisner Awards in San Diego, we won Best Limited Series, Best Painter, and Best Publication Design.

LOU: *Good. So you managed to grab enough ego-balming there, I'm sure.*

KURT: Oh, yes. It was quite a surprise and a lot of fun. At the Eisners, Alex and I were sitting next to **Paul Dini** and **Bruce Timm,** who won for Best Single issue for BATMAN ADVENTURES: MAD LOVE. And a well-deserved award that was. So afterwards, Paul, Bruce, Alex and I, and **Richard Starkings,** who did the production design for MARVELS, and a few other people all went out to dinner to celebrate. We had so many award plaques at that table, we were building card houses out of 'em. *(Laughter.)* It was quite a rush.

LOU: *Over the last twelve years or so,*

Busiek's "Scoundrels in Space" from Disney's MICKEY MOUSE ADVENTURES #16. Art: John Costanza & Rick Hoover.


I'M GLAD YOU MADE IT DOWN HERE TO THE SPACE CENTER, MICKEY! I THOUGHT YOU'D BE TOO BUSY.
ARE YOU KIDDING, COLONEL DOBERMAN? I WOULDN'T MISS YOUR SHUTTLE LAUNCH FOR THE WORLD!
AND IT'S SURE AN HONOR TO MEET YOU, DR. SKOTT! I'VE BEEN READING ABOUT YOUR GREAT WORK FOR YEARS!
;HARUMPH!; YOU ARE TOO KIND, MR. MOUSE! I COUNT ALL MY PREVIOUS WORK AS BUT A WARM-UP FOR TODAY'S TEST OF MY...
MICKEY MOUSE
SCOUNDRELS IN SPACE!

MICKEY MOUSE TM & ©1994 The Walt Disney Company

MAY RELEASES FROM ENTITY!

"My first great loves as a reader were Oz books."

REPTAR, King of the Dinosaurs ©1994 Roz & Jack Kirby

Kurt: "I love Devil Dinosaur." So, for you, Kurt (and the readers) we've unearthed this never-seen pencil drawing by the late Jack Kirby. (It is possible that this model-type sheet *was* Devil Dinosaur. Only Moon Boy knows for sure!)

I'd like to ask, did you ever feel like you were laboring for little, as if you were on a treadmill or something? This one should give us neo-scripters some courage, because I know it's been a long haul for you from fan to award-winning scripter. Did you ever feel like, "Well, what am I doing this thing for?", or what?

KURT: Absolutely. Oh, absolutely. Keep in mind that, for the past twelve years, I have almost never been writing a regular series. I wrote nine issues of POWER MAN AND IRON FIST in a row, twelve issues total in that series. I wrote eight issues of LIBERTY PROJECT. I wrote an issue and a half of VAMPIRELLA. And I'm now working on my fourth issue in a row of NIGHT THRASHER. But other than that, it's been mini-series, specials, graphic albums, fill-ins, and one-issue stories. And that is just a constant treadmill of finding the next job — by the time you're writing issue #2 of a mini-series, you had better be lining up what you're going to do afterward, or you're gonna finish issue #4 and have nothing to do. So I have spent a great deal of my career on the phone, lining up what the next job is going to be. And it has often been extremely discouraging. It wasn't until 1989-90 that I could actually make a living off my freelancing. So that was seven or eight years of doing it before I could do just that.

LOU: *Were you, like, doing data processing at the time to pick up the extra bills?*

KURT: No. I worked as a literary agent, and as the assistant editor at MARVEL AGE, and I even worked at Burger King for a short time. I tried to make sure that I was always working in publishing, not that Burger King counts, though there *are* deadlines. After the Burger King job, working at MARVEL AGE and at the literary agency, I was still learning things and making contacts and becoming a better writer. And of course, I also spent a couple of years at Marvel doing direct sales, after being a literary agent and before being a full-time freelancer. So I was doing stuff that was related to the comic-book industry to keep money coming in.

LOU: *Do you have a great inspiration from this twelve years, finally making the breakthrough just recently?*

KURT: Well, I don't know. Aside from NIGHT THRASHER, which is not selling very well — I don't know how well my first issues have sold, but that could be cancelled at any time, unless you fans out there go out and support it! *(Laughter.)* — I'm still not doing anything regular. I'm still doing mini-series, one-shots. Admittedly, I'm doing mini-series on a higher scale. I'm doing YOUNGBLOOD: YEAR ONE instead of THE LEGEND OF WONDER WOMAN. But I'm certainly still working and still busy, and I can't complain about my work load. My dream is still to do a few regular books, so that I know going into one San Diego Con or Dallas Fantasy Fair that the next time I come to this convention, I'll be working on the same stuff, with twelve added to the issue number.

That's why I got into comics in the first place, to answer the question, "What happens next?" I've always been a big fan of serial fiction. My first great loves as a reader were Oz books, and Enid Blighton books, and any book where, if I liked it, I could go get the next book and see those characters again and find out what happened next. Comics is perfect for that. But I have rarely had the chance to write what happens next on anything but a minimal basis.

LOU: *Any summing-up thoughts on your career so far?*

KURT: I think it's going okay so far.

All artwork accompanying this interview ©1994 Larry Marder, unless otherwise noted.

LARRY MARDER

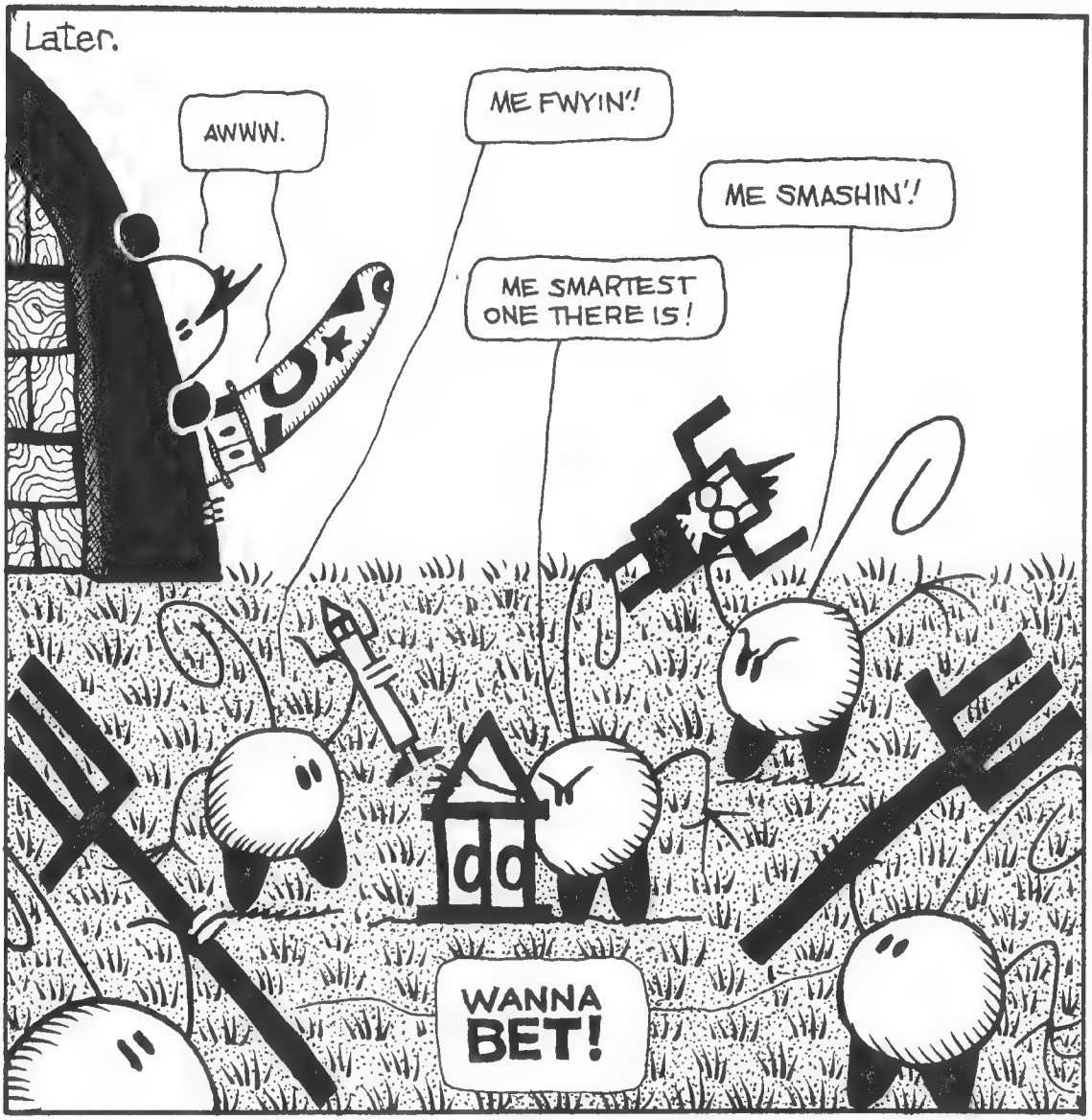
In part one, Larry discussed diverse influences on BEANWORLD, from Marcel Duchamp to Robert Crumb to Jack Kirby, and explained how he came out of the alternative small press to be the ambassador for mainstream Image Comics.

Image Comics?

LOU MOUGIN: *So Image needed new ideas, new ways of doing things — which, in a way, explains —*

LARRY MARDER: Yes, bringing *me*

"I can talk about BEANWORLD all day."



in — I don't have any big-time publishing experience either. I come from the small press. I come from the alternatives.

LOU: *But you also come out of advertising.*

LARRY: And I also come out of advertising. And I also have worked in offices of 15 to 20 people, for 20 years. I understand the internal dynamics of running an office like Image. And Image feels far more like an advertising agency than a publishing company, because of the way that we are structured, which really sort of delegates all the authority for cutting deals out into the individual studios. We don't cut royalties; we don't do any of those things. In other words, if somebody is working on a book in one of the studios, whatever that book makes, after printing costs and advertising costs and all these things are deducted, we send a big check, a lump sum, to the studios. And the studios divide it up into the letterer, and the inker, and the royalty, and the this and the that. We don't worry about that. So, therefore, we spend more of our time worrying about where film is, and what's the current state of the solicitations, what's the current state of the advertising. It's very, very comfortable for me. It's the environment I've been around my entire life, my entire adult life, a good 20 years.

LOU: *We'll get back to Image later on, but, by gosh, I am going to ask two more BEANWORLD questions.*

LARRY: I can talk about BEANWORLD all day!

LOU: *Unfortunately, they're probably gonna kick me out of this hotel room in about thirty minutes. How's about explaining some of the characters for us neos . . . Mr. Spook, Prof. Garbanzo, Beanish, Heyoka, whomever you want to touch on.*

LARRY: Sure. I have sort of set up the Bean tribe *as* a tribe, and tried to give all of the characters who have names sort of a typical status in the tribe. Mr. Spook is the leader. He's a chief, but he's a chief in the most primitive sense. He's the most important person because he's the stron-

"There are certain things that I can't talk about

gest, and if you are with him you are protected. It's not like he is chief through some mystical blood rite, which is a much larger culture that believes that. It's more like with Native Americans, which is that if the most respected person gets up and goes, "Today I'm striking my tepee; we're headin' west, and we're gonna pick pecans today," and he gets up with his family and goes, and everybody else goes, "Wow, he's leavin'! We're going with him!" He never said, "We are all ordered to go and do this." It's just that everybody defers to him. And so Mr. Spook is that kind of leader.

LOU: *And one thing that I will interject is that even though Spook is the closest thing you would have to a hero figure, his business is not going out there and whupping up on bad guys. His business is preserving the life cycle of the tribe.*

LARRY: To serve and protect.

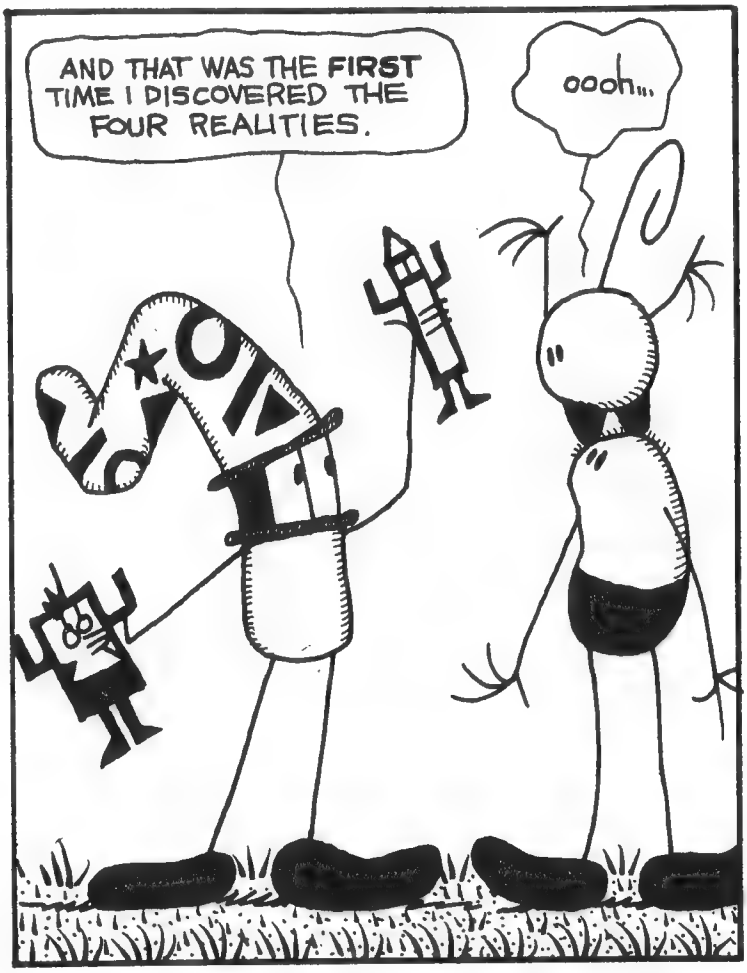
LOU: *To serve and protect. The old Superman figure, I would say, from the '50s.*

LARRY: Yes. His most important function, the way that he protects his people, is by keeping them fed. So his primary responsibility is as a hunter. Anyway, he is the hero; he is the natural leader; and he is the coolest looking one. *(Laughter.)* And he's the most popular.

Next in importance is Professor Garbanzo.

LOU: *The shaman guy?*

LARRY: Professor Garbanzo the tool maker, and she's the thinker, the brainy one. She analyzes things. She has more progressive thoughts than Mr. Spook — at least in the books up till now. Mr. Spook has been a very conservative person. He becomes a bit more of a progressive later on. But Professor Garbanzo is like, "There are things to be invented. And when you invent things, they make life easier. And making life easier is better." So she's always looking for new ways to invent things and to find out how things work. She's a very, very curious person.



LOU: *I was about to say, the house structure she enters —*

LARRY: Professor Garbanzo's Fixit Shop.

LOU: *Right. Are we ever going to find out the origin of that, or is it going to be kind of an iconic thing that's always been there?*

LARRY: It's an iconic thing that's always been there.

LOU: *Like the monolith in 2001.*

LARRY: That's an interesting comparison. I will probably talk about it at the very end cycle. There are certain things about it and Gran'Ma'Pa that I can't talk about at all until, it's like, "Well, that's the way it works! The End! That's all, folks!" But it was only recently, in the last couple of books, that it became apparent that it has been there for a long, long time. And the future stuff that I'm working on right now deals with Professor coming to grips with the fact that the Fixit Shop is there every year, but every year there's a new Professor Garbanzo. And this time, something's gone horribly wrong in this particular cycle. And Professor Garbanzo doesn't have the memories that she's supposed to have, and Mr. Spook is not the hero that's supposed to be the hero. In other words, there's been an environmental disaster. Yet, life goes on. It mutates. It adapts. It finds ways to still grow. Weeds grow through cracks in the sidewalk.

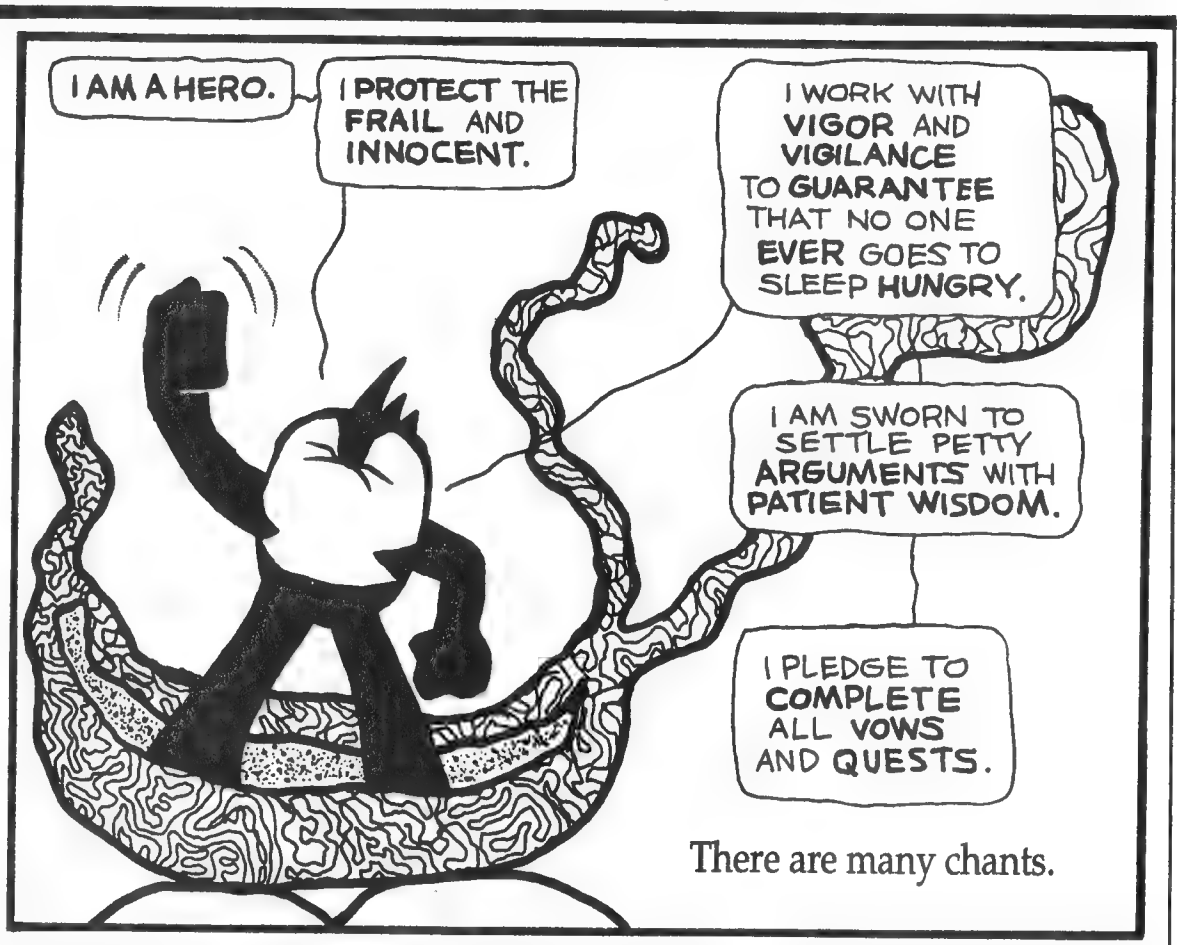
LOU: *Or fish learn how to live in polluted rivers.*

LARRY: Right. Unfortunately. And then the next character, who is Beanish, who is the artist, in exchange for food — he no longer hunts — he creates entertainment. visual entertainment for the beans on the days in which they do not hunt. Then there's the Boom'r Band, which is a trio of musicians. They also no longer have any hunting chores, because, again, they are provided food in exchange for their services.

LOU: *I was wondering if there was such a thing as trying out for the Boom'r Band, or are they created as such?*

LARRY: They were more-or-less created as such, out of whole cloth, but the concept of music in conjunction with the flow factor is the future of Beanworld. So there will be more people participating in the making of music, as there are more beans. And there will be many, many more beans. The thing is, what we're sort of looking at now is watching one generation of beans grow up, and then once we all understand how that works, then as more beans come in, there are more Pod'l Pools as the culture gets larger and larger,

until it's like, 'That's the way it works. The end.'"


I AM A HERO.
I PROTECT THE FRAIL AND INNOCENT.
I WORK WITH VIGOR AND VIGILANCE TO GUARANTEE THAT NO ONE EVER GOES TO SLEEP HUNGRY.
I AM SWORN TO SETTLE PETTY ARGUMENTS WITH PATIENT WISDOM.
I PLEDGE TO COMPLETE ALL VOWS AND QUESTS.
There are many chants.

as they run out of space on their little island and have to find other places to live. We won't have to watch the entire cycle of what it's like for them to have to be born, because you'll have this information.

This is the shortcoming for me, or the interesting part for me, from starting BEANWORLD from big drawings on the wall and keeping all these notebooks filled with information. By the time it came time to actually tell a comic, it's like, "Well, you have to tell an interesting comic! You can't jam everything in so that it's incomprehensible." So there are many, many things . . . really, the first 21 issues of BEANWORLD were just a prologue to say, "This is how it all works, and now, we're gonna go faster!" And that's why I want to do 60-page stories, 48-page stories, things like that. My storytelling works best when it's one long, self-contained story. The stories that most people like are the ones that are book-length and self-contained. So I got in the habit, in the teen numbers of the book, of telling continued stories and trying to stress that it was a periodical. But it didn't come out often enough for that to work. So I felt that it was a failed experiment. And so, I would much rather that, instead of reading four short BEANWORLDs a year, people get one big, long, fat one. So once a year, you're gonna get a really nice treat.

LOU: *That sounds like a good one. I'll definitely be looking forward to it. I'm also intrigued by Heyoka's adventure, the lady that falls up.*

LARRY: Yeah, the upside-down and backwards bean. Heyoka is a real word. Heyoka is a clown, a contrary person, in the Lakota Sioux culture. I'm fascinated by the idea that, in a small community, there is somebody who is obligated by a religious vision — I'm talking about the real Heyokas, now — to live a contrary life. They do things backwards; they do things upside-down, but in other cultures they're clearly sacred clowns. In Lakota culture it's a little less formalized, than, say, "sacred clown." But they serve an incredible purpose, because no matter how terrible things are, the largest function they would serve in a primitive culture, particularly during the winter months when the summer stores would sort of run out and people would be really hungry, and in some years really starving, the Heyokas would be walking around in the snow, going, "What a beautiful day it is today!" And they would cook "stew" which was really just boiled water, and they would eat it and say, "This is the best-tasting stew I've ever had!" And I think it was very important for people to go, "I feel bad off, but there's somebody worse off than me."

And I think they still exist in our culture. I think they are street people, talking to themselves on the corner.

LOU: *You might be right, at that.*

LARRY: I especially think it's interesting that those people gather in business centers. I really got this idea when I was working in advertising, because you'd be in this high-pressure situation, where you'd have money and products and problems and schedules, and you'd go out to lunch, and there'd be some guy outside, in the middle of winter, with three overcoats on, hats on, gloves on, yodeling and talking to himself. And I'd go, "That's a Heyoka!" In our culture, that is a Heyoka.

"I think it important for people to feel someone is worse off."

You can look at that person and go, "There's somebody worse off than me." It is the exact same function.

LOU: *Although you never know. He might be looking at us, and saying —*

LARRY and LOU: "There's somebody that's a lot worse off than I am!"

LARRY: That's exactly right! Anyway, in the culture of Beanworld, Heyoka sort of serves that upside-down and backwards function. In my next book, she comes back almost immediately to the Beanworld. She has an encounter with the Big Fish on her return, and she starts becoming more of a fixture in the Beanworld. She will be an everyday player. She's one of my favorite characters.

LOU: *She's one of my favorite characters in the book, too.*

LARRY: And it's one of those things again, where I knew from the beginning that this was an important character. But again, I couldn't — she was too much. There were too many characters. There are other characters. I mean, Beanish was a character that I knew from day one that I wanted. But I didn't introduce Beanish until issue #4. You can't just do everything; you have to start somewhere. And I didn't start at the very beginning either, because the very beginning isn't as exciting as it was when I finally got around to some more of the beginning in BEANWORLD #20 and #21. It was more exciting than it had been back at the time of BEANWORLD #1.

LOU: *You had to pull out some more pieces of the picture to get to it.*

LARRY: Yeah. It's a big puzzle, and I'm always pulling pieces out and going, "Well, you got more pieces. I'm starting to see a pattern here."

LOU: *Yeah. One thing that fascinates me as a writer is that, whenever I hit a story, I realize that I can't tell the entire story that I've got there. I just have to pull out enough pieces of it to give you an idea of what the real story is, and hope it works.*

LARRY: Right. Exactly right.

LOU: *It's like pulling out a slice of cheese, or pulling out part of a stew, and hoping you get the idea of what the whole thing tastes like from that part of it.*

LARRY: Exactly.

LOU: *My gosh, I think I've gotten a profound thought here!* (Laughter.)

LARRY: It's always food. When you're dealing with BEANWORLD, it's always food.

LOU: *And we never get to see who eats it!* (Laughter.) *I hope nobody does. Okay . . . "The Nexus of All Comic-Book Realities." That was a name you were given by Dave Sim, right?*

LARRY: Actually, it was given to me by **Gary Colabuono.** Dave heard Gary refer to me as that on the Chicago tour, and he's the one who printed it that way. *(Laughter.)* It started out as a joke. Now it seems to actually be a job I have. I actually, without sounding too pompous or pretentious, take it pretty seriously.

LOU: *Well, good. Somebody has to be that.*

LARRY: When somebody like **Jeff Smith** showed up one day — he was on, I don't know, BONE #3 or #4; he was selling, I don't know, about 2,000 or 3,000 comics; and he was getting mail saying, "I don't know, I like BONE; do you like TALES OF THE BEANWORLD?" And he didn't know much of anything about comics at the time, the business. There was an article about me getting my job at Moondog's in THE

"BONE in CEREBUS accelerated Jeff's career."

COMICS JOURNAL, and it had a picture of Mr. Spook illustrating it. He said, "Oh, that looks sort of interesting!" So he gave me a call — his wife, Ajaya, was gonna be in Chicago for some business, and he gave me a call, and we met. And I read his comics, and he read my comics, and it was like, "Oh, we like each other, this is cool." And I said, "You've gotta meet **Dave Sim.**" It was sort of funny, because it was at the Capital show in '92, and Jeff was sitting there at his table, doing whatever it was that he was doing. And I came over, and I said, "Hey, how you doin'? 'Cause we had just met a couple of weeks before in Chicago. And I said, "Did you get in touch with **Dave Sim** yet?" "No." "Well, you should." And I said, "I'll watch your table. You take these comics, and I want you to go over there right now, and give him these comics." And he said, "Oh, I can't do that; he's got a really long line." I'm going, "Jeff, you're a professional. Believe me. You just to up there, say, 'Excuse me,' just hand him the things and get out of there. I'll watch your table." And that's what he did.

Dave connected to it, printed the stuff in CEREBUS. And the BONE stuff being in CEREBUS was a very key part of the acceleration of Jeff's career. Again, it was just sort of that I played this key moment, as this "nexus" works, to say, "You're interesting. I think you should meet that guy."

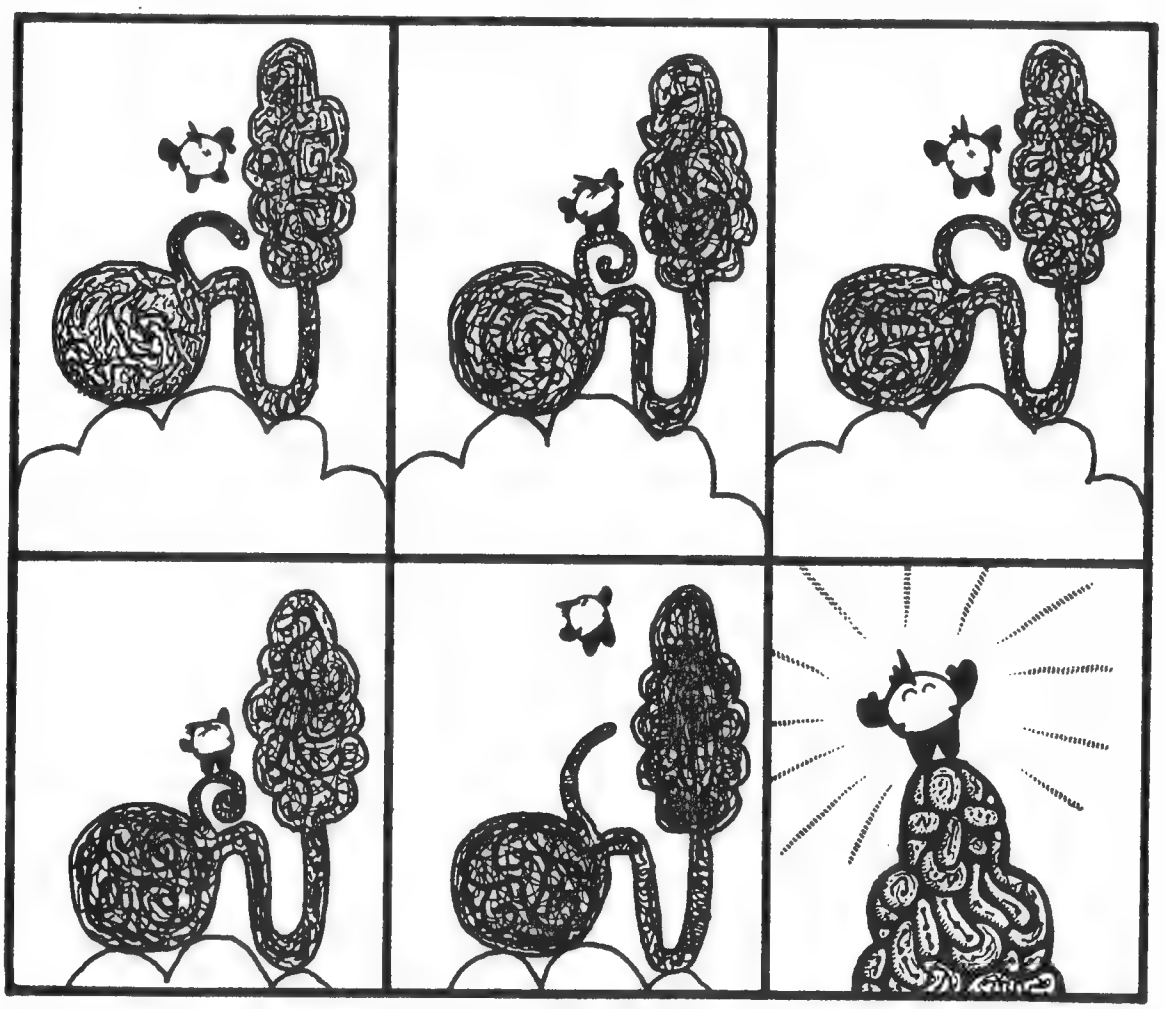
LOU: *Another thing I flashed on when you told me that, of course, is Jim Valentino's appearance, the first time I saw his work, in the back of CEREBUS, with his autobiographical stories.*

LARRY: That's right. Well, Dave is certainly very, very influential. The stories that run in the back of CEREBUS are very, very influential. You know, **Bill Loebs** was first there. **Arn Saba.** There are all sorts of people that we first became aware of there. And it's going on now, with **Terry Moore's** STRANGERS IN PARADISE. And a lot of other things that were —

LOU: *Dave seems to know the people that are worth taking a chance on. Good for you, Dave.*

LARRY: Really!

LOU: *Okay, I don't know how much you can tell me about what kind of problems and challenges Image is facing at this time. I don't know if the sales are falling, levelling off, or rising. Also, I'd like to talk about the creative bit there. It seems like Image is trying to upgrade the stories somewhat. Beforehand, I've perceived Image for the most part as being an art book kind of thing, structured around artists. And now they're starting to realize that they need to inject story in there as well. So we have people like Alan Moore there, and Chris Claremont doing the WILDC.A.T.S. thing, and my friend Mark Waid was approached about doing something for them . . .*



FABULOUS FIRST ISSUE!

THE END IS ONLY THE BEGINNING...

FEB. '95 FROM

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BY JOHN MIGLIORE & RAFF IENCO

ENTITY COMICS

ASTER #4
BY ROXAS & ISABEDRA

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"Kurt Busiek's doing something for almost everyone."

LARRY: Kurt Busiek's doing something for almost everybody.

LOU: *Oh? What's he doing for Image?*

LARRY: Well, he's definitely doing YOUNGBLOOD: YEAR ONE. As we speak, he's having a breakfast meeting with **Jim Lee,** so he's doing something there. He's doing the REGULATORS mini-series for **Jim Valentino.** I can't remember off the top of my head what he's doing for **Marc Silvestri.** He's also doing something for **Erik Larsen.** He's doing something for everyone, except **Todd McFarlane,** and that'll probably happen eventually. It'll be **"Kurt Busiek's** Image World Tour." *(Laughter.)*

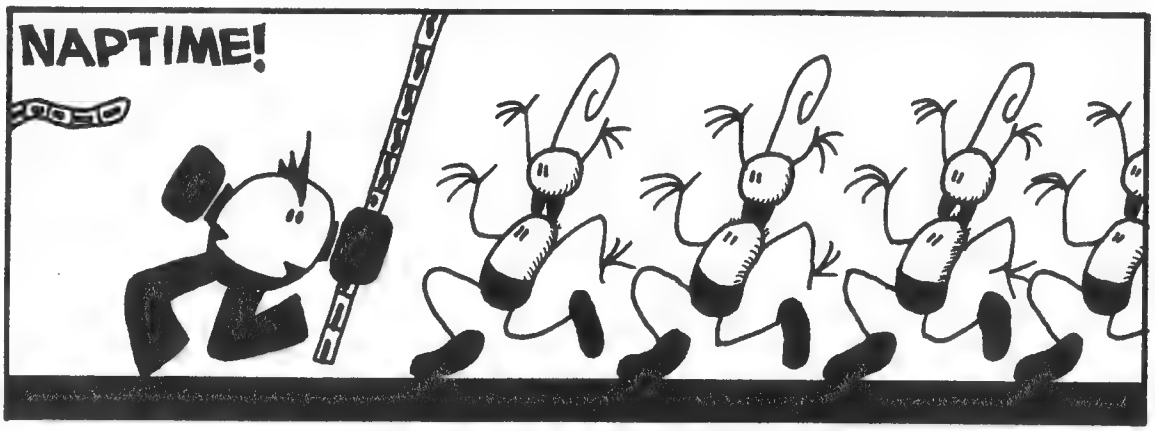
LOU: *He gets to tour with each one of the studios.*

LARRY: Anyway, to your original question: Image's sales have been steadily, as we speak now, at the beginning of August, in a steady increase since April. They had a disastrous winter and so did the entire industry. But we've levelled off, and our sales have been going up. We've put out a lot of books. We've been putting out thirty books a month for four or five months. And sales are still relatively strong. Our sell-through is very, very good, and our line average is the best in the business. So, what we're doing has really come down to — a couple of years ago, it was like, there was Marvel and DC, and then there were a lot of contenders. There was Malibu, there was Valiant, there was Dark Horse, there was Image. It's now a war between Marvel and Image.

LOU: *You would cut DC out of the*

GOTTA GET THIS THING NICE AND WET!
GOTTA FIND WATER!
I DON'T KNOW IF THERE IS ANY WATER 'ROUND HERE.
MR. SPOOK discovers the LEGENDARY EDGE.
WATER!
BUT IT'S VERY FAR AWAY.
Then he discovers the PROVERBIAL SANDY BEACH.
WATER!
IT'S SOAKIN' IT UP GOOD!
IT'S HEAVY AND IT DON'T TASTE TOO GOOD...
...BUT IT IS CHOW!!

"I do my best work when I'm stuck in this tension



picture?

LARRY: DC has got their own agenda and they're following their own vision. I do not think that when our market share goes up, that we are getting DC readers. I think when our market share goes up that we are getting Marvel readers.

LOU: *Well, one thing that did get me about Image, and even seeing their books in convenience stores — you wouldn't see most of the other indies there — the lesson seemed to be that Marvel can be taken. Which nobody would have imagined a short while ago.*

LARRY: Taken is a strong word. But we certainly can compete with them. And the reason you see Image comics on the newsstand or anywhere else is that they're very well aware of the fact that when Marvel comics took off on the newsstand, that Image guys are the guys that drew those comics. **Todd McFarlane, Jim Lee, Rob Liefeld, Whilce Portacio,** these guys were the guys that reinvented the X-Men and Spider-Man, the current reinvention. Those characters, of course, are always being reinvented. SPAWN does spectacularly on the newsstand.

So what we've been hearing all summer long is, "Yeah, the industry is in a fairly weak state at the current time. But Image is doing pretty good. Image is picking up." But you've got people who are dropping marginal Marvel titles and saying, "I'd rather buy Image." Whereas at DC, you have incredible explosive growth, in Vertigo and things like that. That's a different game than our game. As far as where ZERO HOUR takes their superhero line, gee, we don't know anything about that sitting here right now. In October or November, we'll have some idea of whether or not it worked artistically.

LOU: *One thing I would like to see from Image is something that, if I'm jumping onto it, would give me a comprehensive idea about the characters. Maybe a handbook or something like that. When you throw a large team of characters at me that are not a conglomerate team from separate titles — a BRIGADE, or YOUNGBLOOD, or something like that — and I pick up issue #12 off the stands, I have a hard time figuring who the heck these characters are. That was a* real *problem during DEATHMATE.*

LARRY: Sure. Most of the guys have source books of some sort that will be coming out over the next year. People do find those things sort of helpful. But I think what you're really talking about is a much larger problem that the superhero genre has as a whole. And that is that we have made it so complicated that it is very hard for a casual reader to enter any company on any level and go, "This is pretty cool." Not the way it was when I was a kid! We didn't need source books when I was a kid. So we've reached a point where if anybody ever asks me my opinion, then I tell them that I think we need, not less complicated books, but more self-contained things.

LOU: *More understandable.*

LARRY: Yeah.

LOU: *Complex does not mean incomprehensible.*

LARRY: And I mean this of the industry as a whole. Not necessarily Image or any individual studio, writer, or artist. I just think that we need to make fewer demands on the consumer.

LOU: *More user-friendly.*

LARRY: More user-friendly.

LOU: *I'm definitely with you on that. In other words, if I could pick up the 23rd issue of a book and understand the story in it, I say, "That's a pretty good book." And if I pick up something that I can't understand without picking up five issues beforehand and five issues afterward — which has nothing to do with a serial, of course — then I have to say, "Sorry, guys."*

LARRY: Then it becomes very difficult. And if you were gonna do that, because **Dave Sim** has done that successfully, then you make sure that all of your back material is always in print. So I'm sure that we all recognize the fact that to pick up an issue of CEREBUS today would be an incomprehensible experience. However, you can go to the story and readily available at really reasonable prices is the body of 180-plus issues of work.

LOU: *Right, either in SWORDS OF CEREBUS or in back-issue form.*

LARRY: Either in phonebook form or in current material. "Mothers and Daughters" is a very long storyline, but he's breaking it up into its individual chapters.

LOU: *And he can pull it off. He has the artistic ability to do it. I guess the last question before the statistics is, what are the primary pleasures and banes of your BEANWORLD career and your comics business career?*

LARRY: Well, I can't even separate the business and the art. Because, to get back to something **Duchamp** said which always tickled me, he said, "Art doesn't interest me. Artists do." He continued to practice his own art. I love doing BEANWORLD. There are days when I hate it and all that, but the sheer act of creating characters who kind of dance and sing at the end of my pencil — I love that. BEANWORLD — well, I've always had a day job. And now my life is far more interesting, because my day job is in the comic-book business, in the *center* of the comic-book business, than it was when I was doing advertising and drawing BEANWORLD. I like being an advertising, marketing, and publishing person. I also like being a creator. I think I do my best work when I'm stuck in this sort of tension between these artistic and business responsibilities. My best ideas seem to come when I'm overwhelmed by the

between artistic and business responsibilities."

Over the LEGENDARY EDGE!
GET LOST, CREEPS!!
I SHOULD HAVE DONE THAT THE FIRST DAY THEY ARRIVED!*
MR. SPOOK'S NOT ATTENDING MY FABULOUS LOOK-SEE-SHOW TODAY!
HE LOOKS VERY BUSY. I WONDER WHAT HE'S UP TO?

responsibilities of both. And so my way of life works for me.

And you know, I go to conventions and I sit and give away my BEANWORLD action figures, and I chat with fans, and I don't get big, long lines and I don't care.

LOU: *That may be the best part of it.*

LARRY: Well, in many ways, it is.

LOU: *Because if you're in a big, long line, you're gonna have about* (snaps fingers) *that much time and attention from anybody.*

LARRY: Well, I've been so around the Image thing that it's a different experience. I don't know that it's necessarily better or worse, but it's a different experience. And certainly having conversations with fans about the mysteries contained in my book is an integral part of my work. Why I do this, and why they enjoy it. But BEANWORLD, for what it is and for what it sells, is basically a cartoonist's book. So I'm like a cartoonist cartoonist. It's like, you know, the majority of comic-book consumers may not understand what I'm doing or appreciate it, but a lot of the people whose work they like, *they* like my work. And that has opened up many, many doors for me.

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

NO "DARTH" OF ROLES FOR VADER

Hi, Julia:

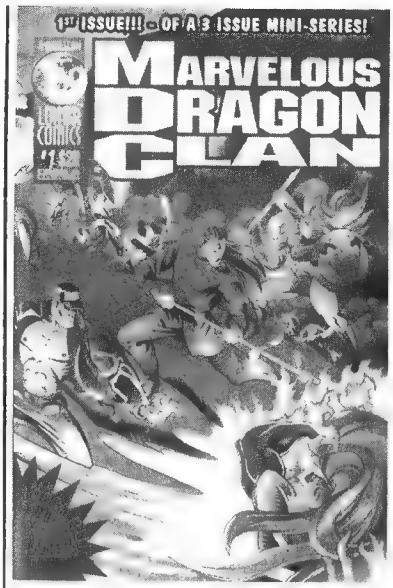
Many thanks for the copies of COMICS INTERVIEW #138, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Apart from one or two glaring errors, you made a good job of transcribing the interview.

Don't worry, they were purely phonetic; i.e., page 9 — DIMLIT SUMMERTIME should have read DON'T LET SUMMER COME. And on page 22, the National Orthopaedic Hospital is at Oswestry, not Oslow Street in London. Other than that I was very pleased with the amount of coverage you gave.

'95 looks as though it's going to be a really busy year. Have already got two lots of films on offer. Have been offered a sci-fi movie to be done sometime in Hollywood with me playing the big villain again. And am going out to Sri Lanka filming with **Arthur C. Clark.**

Hope to be stateside A.S.A.P. At the moment it looks as if March 2/3/4/5. The World Horror Con in Atlanta will be my first trip, followed by the Famous Monsters Con in L.A. over Memorial Day Weekend.

Dave Prowse
London, England



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Dear DAK,

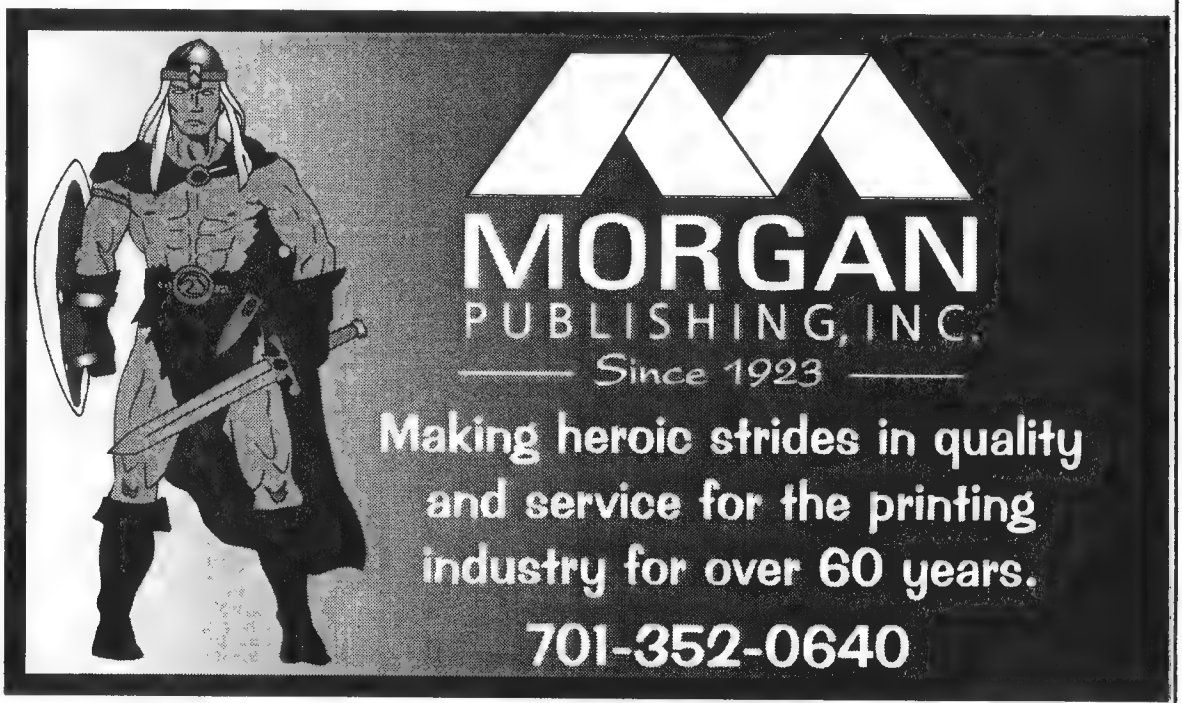
Thank you for producing a wonderful and unique comic-book publication. Your CI is the only consistent source of quality in-depth interviews with comic-book creators! Your value to our comic community is immeasurable. I loved #134, the issue you did on the comics industry crisis! The round table worked really well.

MARVELOUS DRAGON CLAN is my debut comic book. There is a magical atmosphere in the alternative end of comic-book publishing. With the success of CEREBUS, ELFQUEST, TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES, THE ROCKETEER, ZEN THE INTERGALACTIC NINJA, CADILLACS AND DINOSAURS, THE MASK, BONE and THE CROW, reader and investor interest in independent and self-published comic books is rising! I hope you will cover our successes as we grow.

Krueger
P.O. Box 460427
San Antonio, TX 78246

Thanks for the sample copies of MARVELOUS DRAGON CLAN — looks like you're well on the way to baptism by fire in the self-publishing field! Interested readers may obtain copies of the first two issues directly from Krueger at the above address for $7.00 postpaid.

— DAK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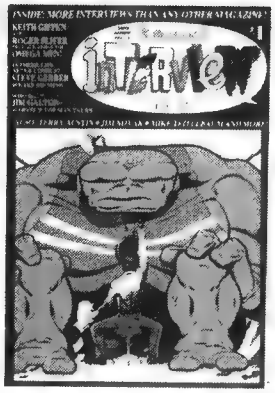

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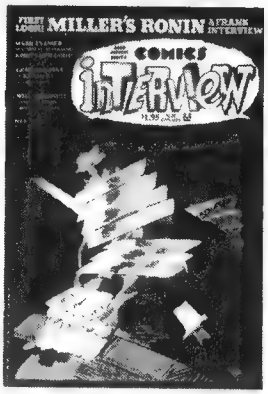

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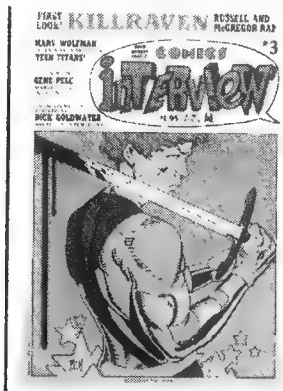
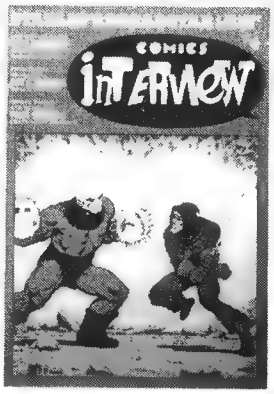


#3 COUNTS AS FIVE **Don McGregor** & **Craig Russell** on KILLRAVEN — Origins of NEW TEEN TITANS told by **Marv Wolfman** — **Howard Chaykin** on AMERICAN FLAGG — French comics by **Neal Adams** — Cover by **Russell.**



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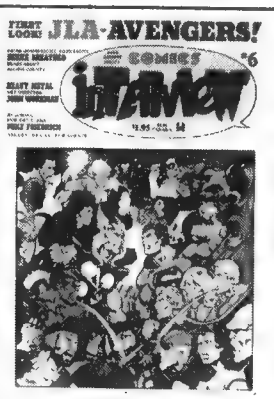
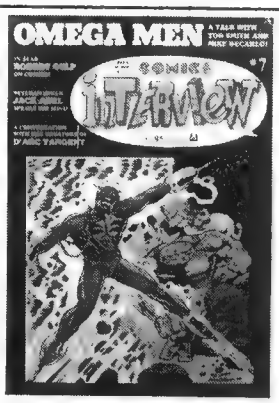
#5-$5.00 **Wendy & Richard Pini** — inside ELFQUEST, part 1 — **Stan Lee,** straight from the shoulder — DC's **Dick Giordano** part 2 — Origins of COMICO. Cover by **Wendy Pini.**



#6 COUNTS AS 3 **George Perez & Roy Thomas** tell all about JLA/AVENGERS feud — inside ELFQUEST, part 2 — **Berke Breathed** blabs about BLOOM COUNTY — more! Awesome cover by **Perez!**



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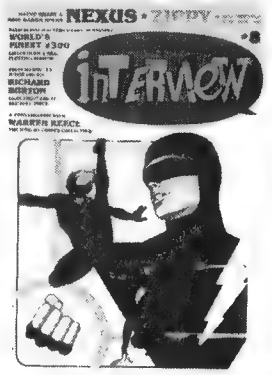

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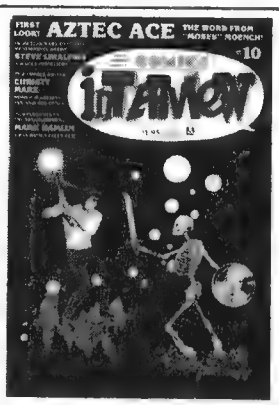

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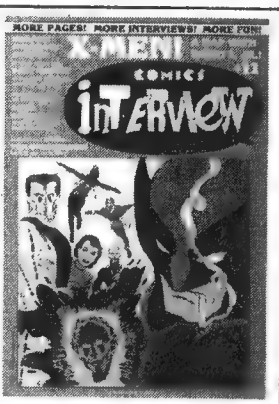

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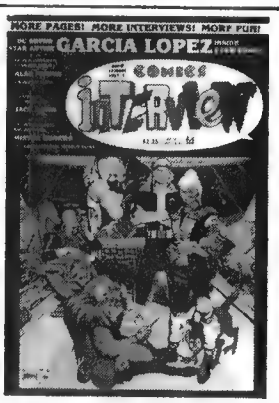

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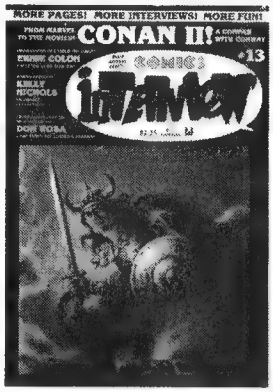

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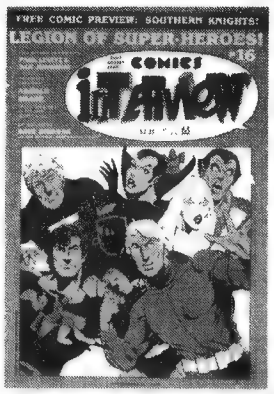

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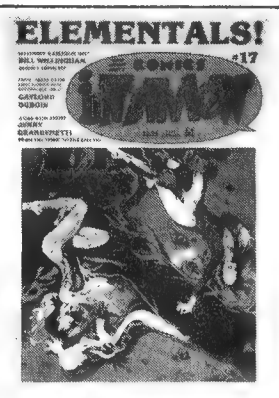

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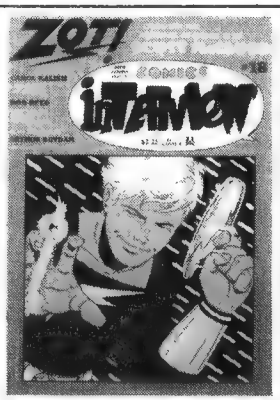

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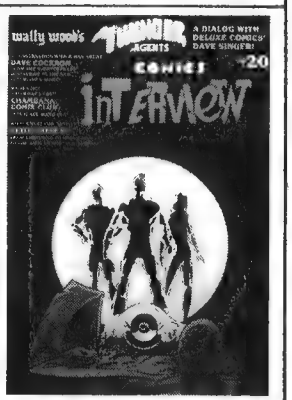

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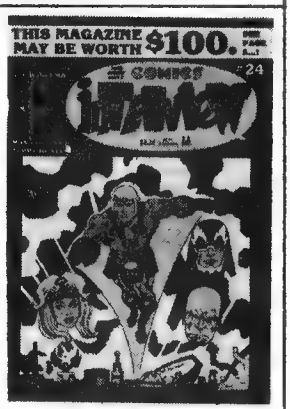

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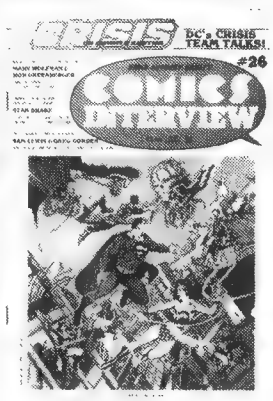

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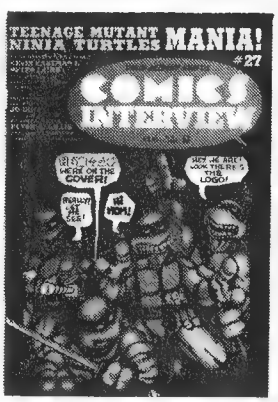

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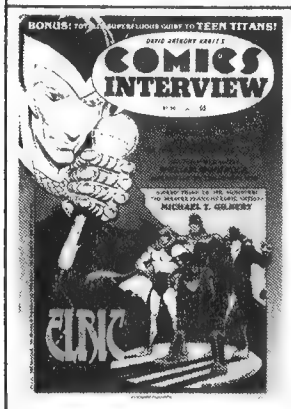

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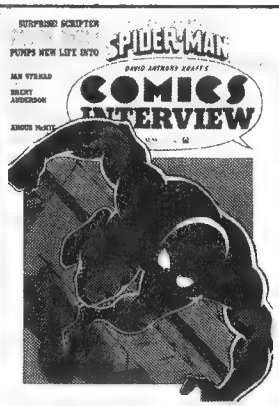

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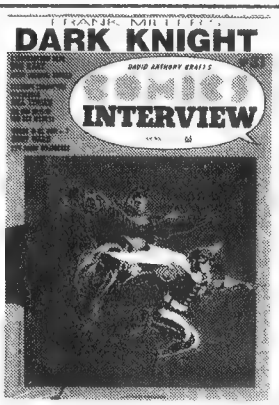

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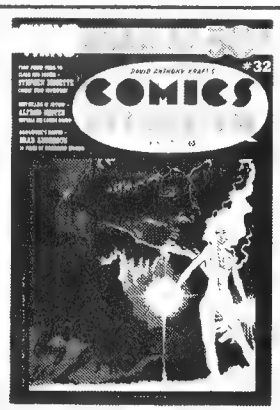

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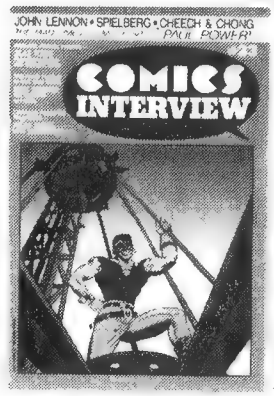

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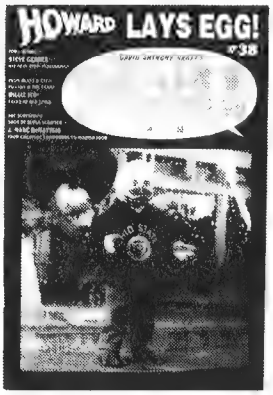

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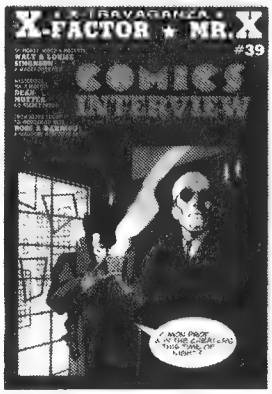

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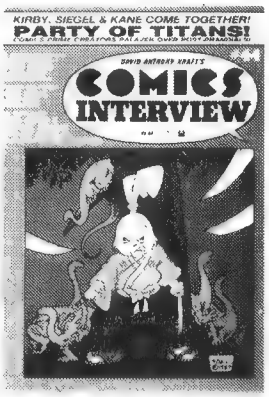

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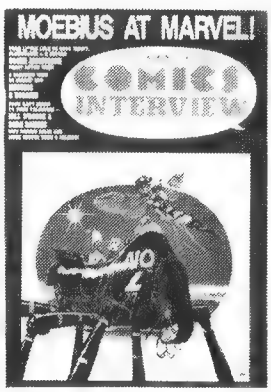

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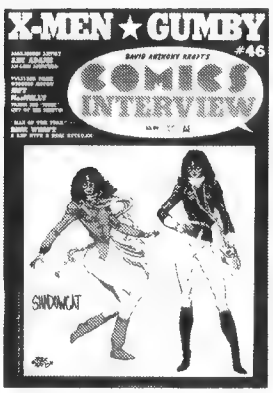

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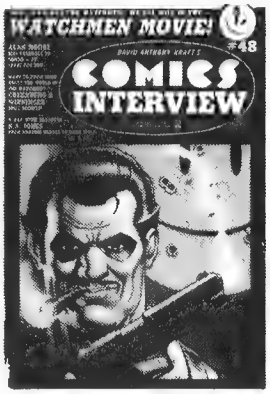

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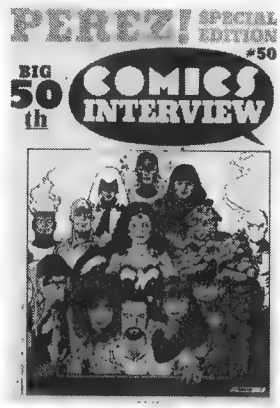

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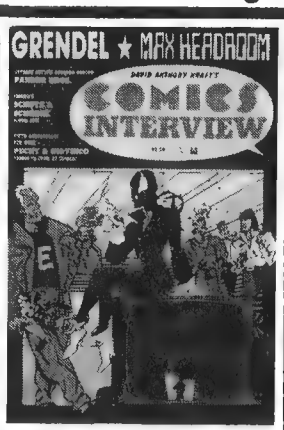

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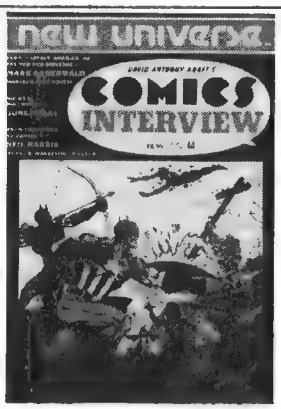

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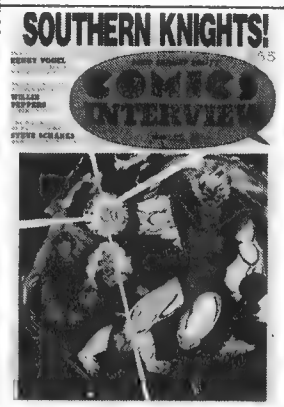

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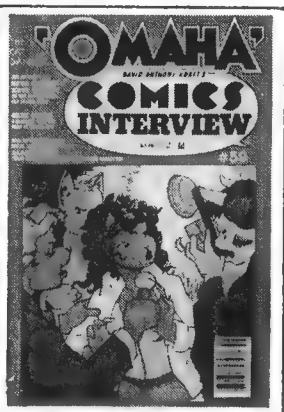

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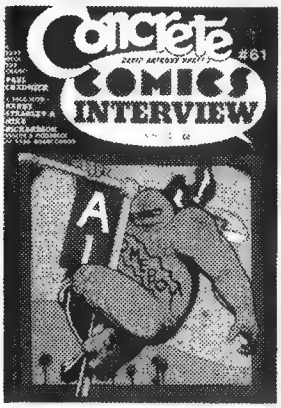

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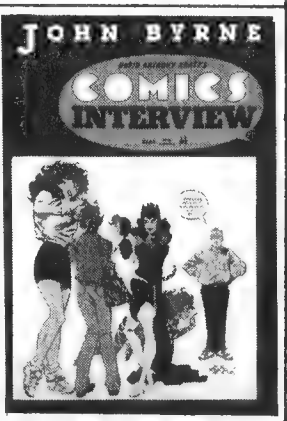

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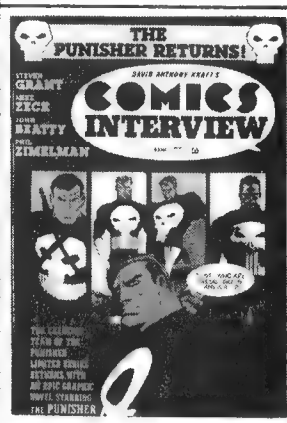

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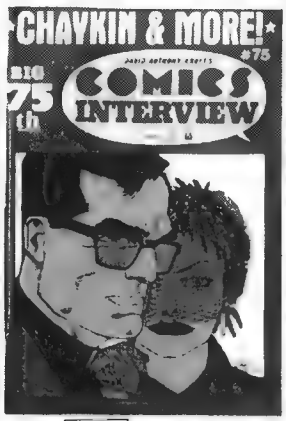

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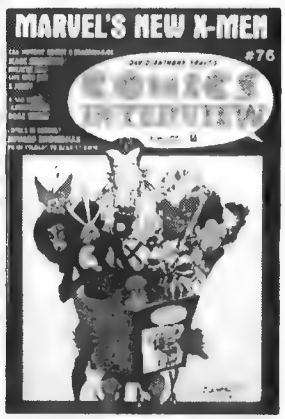

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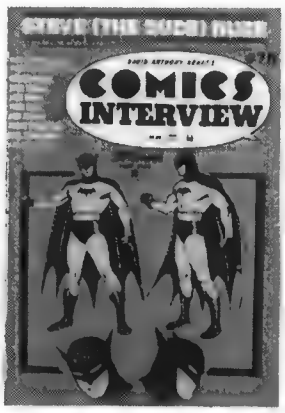

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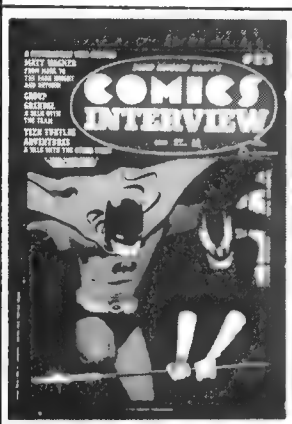

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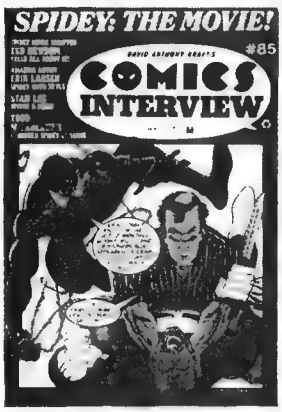

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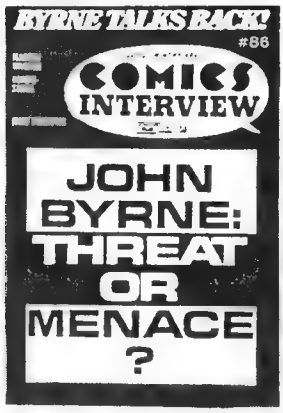

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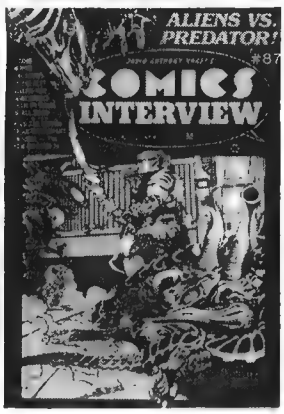

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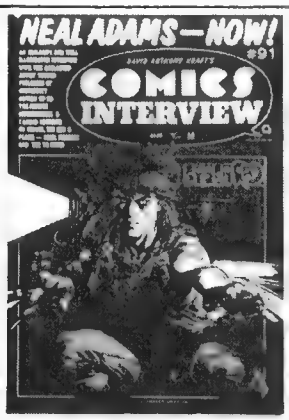

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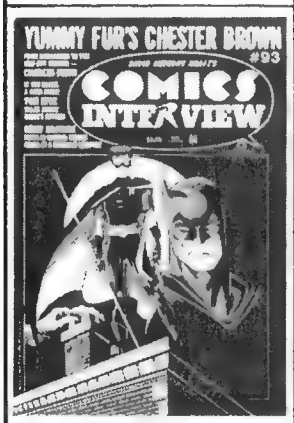

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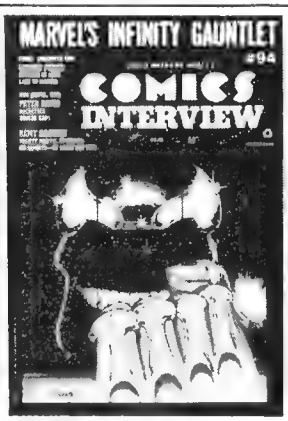

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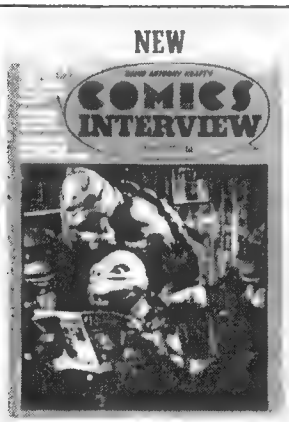

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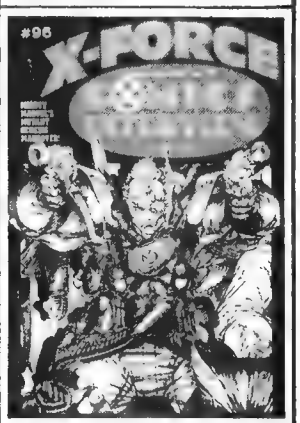

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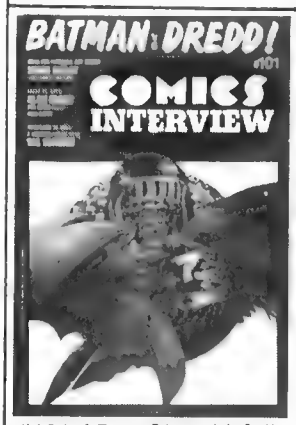

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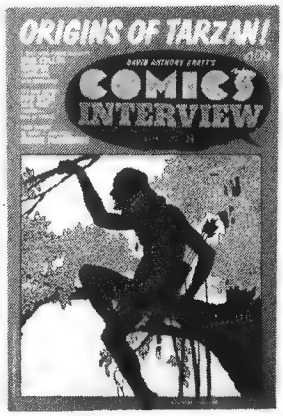

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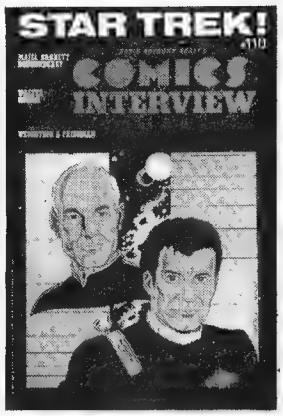

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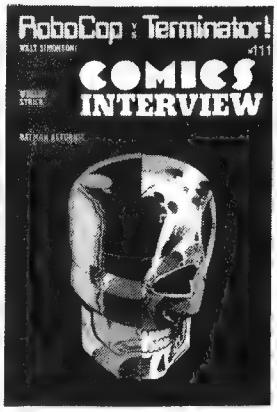

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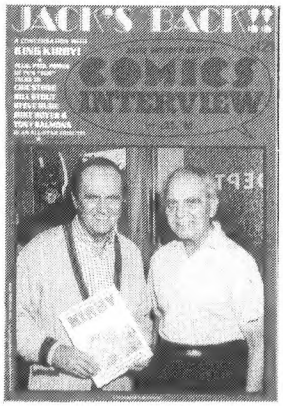

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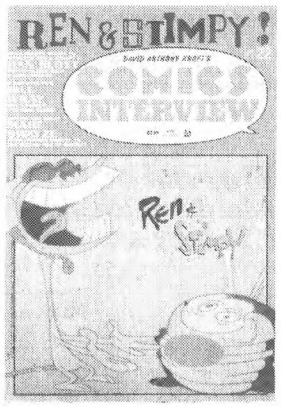

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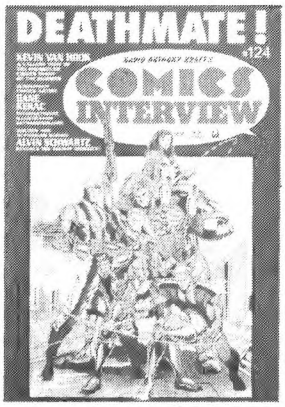

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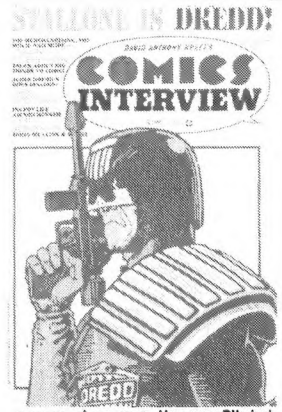

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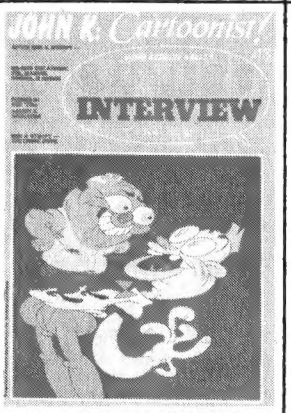

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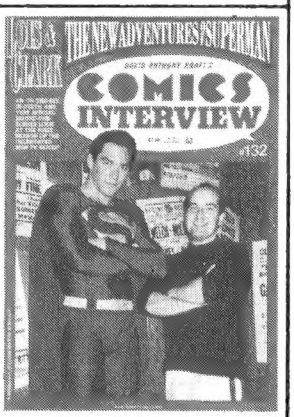

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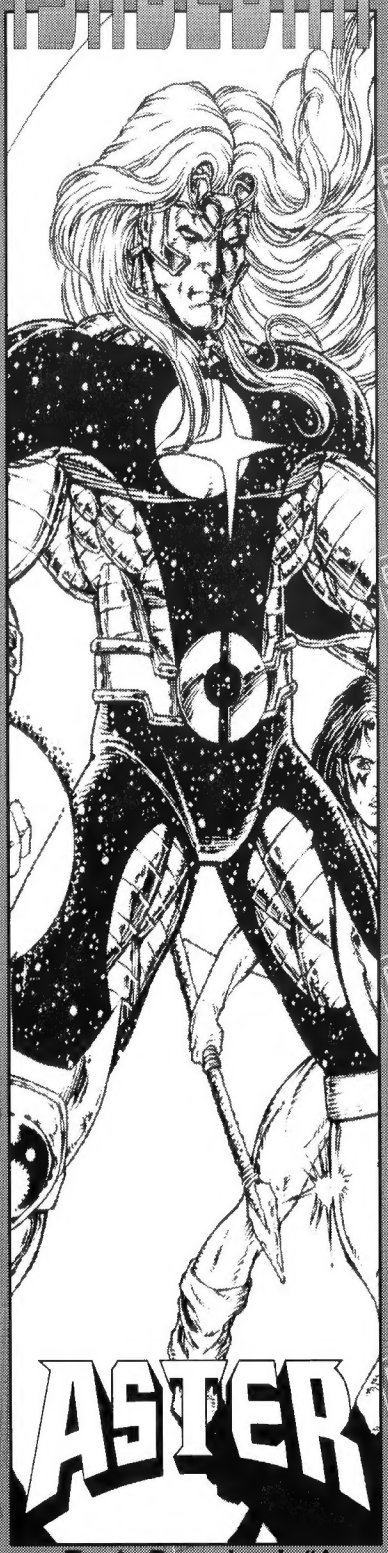

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